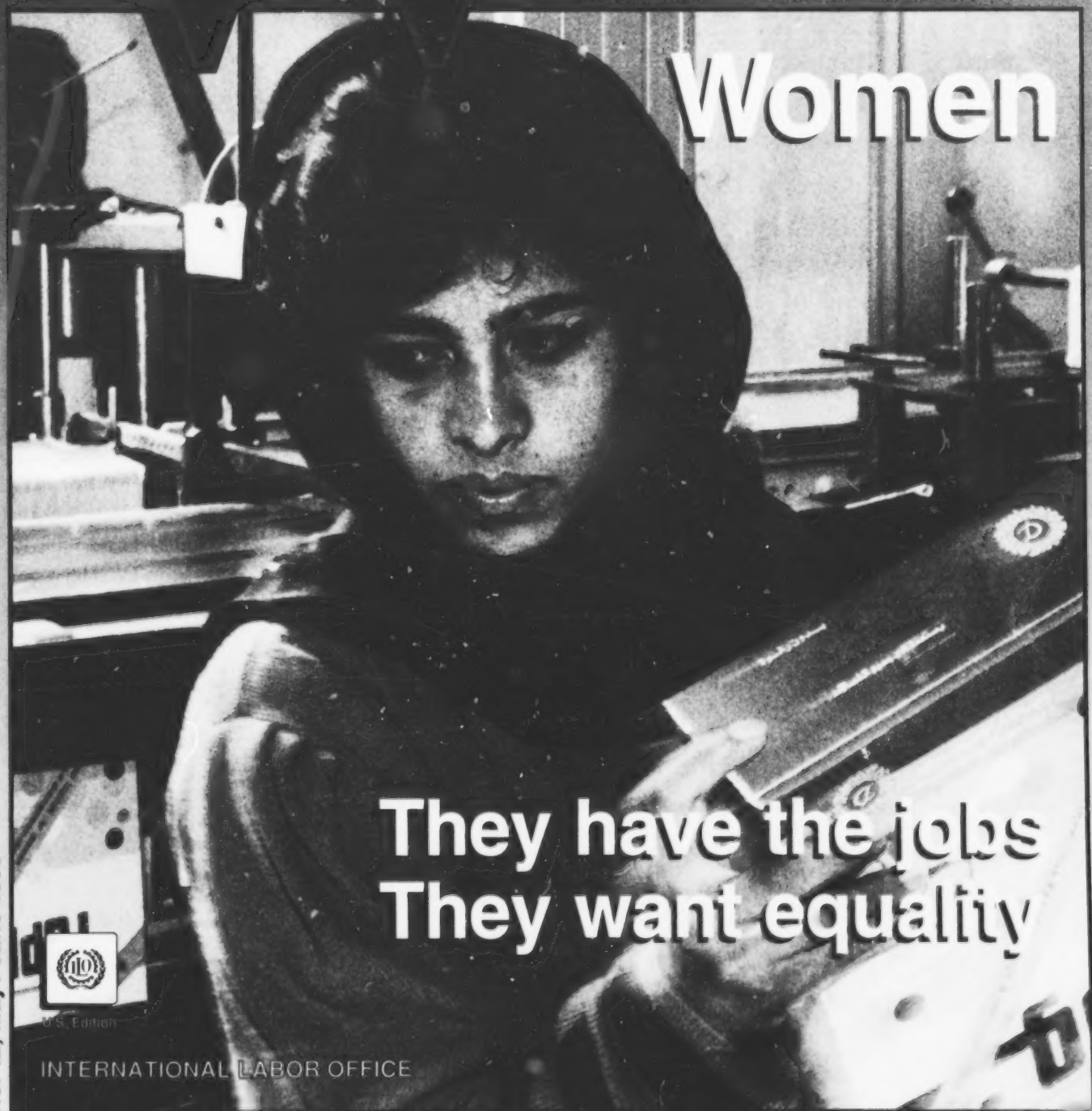
World of Work

THE MAGAZINE OF THE ILO



Women

They have the jobs
They want equality

No. 12, May / June 1995

U.S. Edition

INTERNATIONAL LABOR OFFICE

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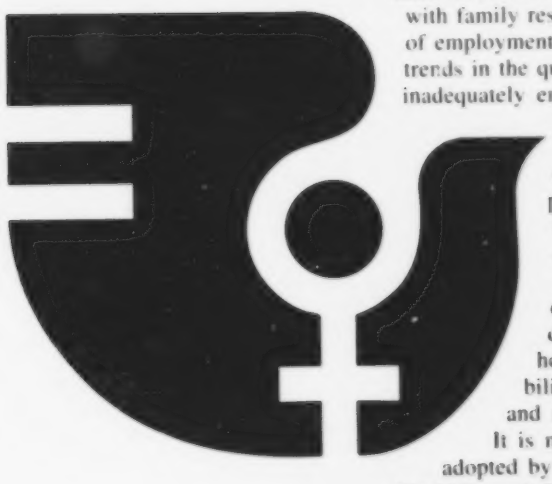
Editorial

Accelerating the pace of progress

Despite significant progress during the last two decades, equality of opportunity and treatment between women and men in the world of work remains elusive as we approach the 21st century. Society stands to be the loser for not fully harnessing all of its human resources towards its sustainable development.

The preparations at the national, regional and international levels for the Fourth World Conference on Women, to be held in Beijing in September 1995, have provided excellent scope for reviewing the current situation of women in society. A number of positive developments have been identified, such as the increase in women's participation in paid employment and even their penetration, albeit in inadequate numbers, of the "glass ceiling" in terms of entry into managerial, decision-making and other stereotype male positions and occupational skills. There are, however, intractable problems and emerging challenges in the wake of the globalization of the economy, technological transformation and restructuring of the labor market. There are the alarming trends in the feminization of poverty, increasing precariousness of women's work, persisting inequality in the sharing of family responsibilities and inadequacy of social infrastructural facilities and other arrangements to permit the reconciliation of work with family responsibilities. It would generally appear that the increase in quantity of employment opportunities for women has not been matched by similar positive trends in the quality of employment. On the whole, women workers' rights remain inadequately emphasized, relatively unknown and insufficiently observed.



The insight accumulated over the years points unequivocally to the need for a comprehensive integrated approach and the involvement of all the relevant actors to tackle elements of the gender inequality problem in the world of work. It is this approach that the ILO is trying to promote today, with 75 years of experience behind it in the area of equality of opportunity and treatment at work.

The dossier devoted by our magazine to this theme is by no means exhaustive. It provides an overview on efforts made over the past two decades, stressing in particular the question asked by most women: how to combine successfully their professional and family responsibilities? It elaborates on the ILO's comprehensive integrated strategy and aspects of the ILO's contributions to the Beijing Conference.

It is my greatest wish that the action-oriented Platform for Action to be adopted by this World Conference together with the conclusions of the recent World Summit for Social Development will provide the relevant impetus for intensified efforts in the future to accelerate the pace of progress towards equality. The ILO is fully committed to playing its part in the follow-up to these events.

Mary Chinery-Hesse
Deputy Director-General

A high-priced slot in the world of work

Youyun Zhang*

In the space of a single decade, women's participation rates have greatly increased, both in the developing as well as in the industrialized world. Women are no longer the "hidden face of the world of work", but are often its most active driving force. Yet another reason to continue the struggle against inequality and discrimination, not only for considerations of social justice and human rights, but in the interest of the economy and sustainable development.

From 1985 to 1995, women have taken a significant if not decisive step in their long march towards equality in the world of work. They have become fully-committed economic actors in their own right and determining factors of change.

However, women's increasing economic contribution remains undervalued. If women are a growing presence in the labor market, it has often been at increasing costs to themselves as well as to their children. It is they who are most vulnerable to the negative impacts of the market and structural adjustment, deteriorating working conditions, unstable or insecure earnings and to the lack of social protection.

FACTS AND FIGURES

- **Women make up nearly 70% of the world's poor and more than 65% of the illiterate. About 600 million women do not know how to read or write.**
- **In São Paulo (Brazil) 31% of the economically active women are unemployed as compared to 11% of the men.**
- **In Nigeria 94% of street food vendors are women.**
- **In Central European countries, women represent between 46 and 48% of the labor force, but often less than one-fourth are employers.**
- **The majority of women workers worldwide continue to be concentrated for the most part in clerical, service, sales and middle-level professional occupations.**

Feminization of employment

Since the beginning of the 1980s, female labor force participation has risen steadily while economic activity rates for men have tended to fall. Thus, in the OECD countries, there were 169.4 million women in the labor force in 1992, some 33 million more than in 1980, having grown by an average of 2% per annum. Female employment itself has increased even faster than the growth of the female labor force.

The increase was most spectacular in countries such as Spain and the Netherlands which entered the 1980s with relatively few women in the labor force. In the United States, Canada and the Nordic countries, women now make up nearly half of the labor force.

In Central and Eastern Europe, female labor generally does not seem to have suffered more than that of men in the transition to a market economy and the recession. The available data for Russia, the Ukraine and Belarus indicate that the share of women in the number of wage and salary earners has not declined. However, in some countries, such as the Czech Republic, measures to urge early retirement lowered the number of women working; older women were more likely to retire to their homes whereas men tended to remain active by finding a lucrative occupation.

In developing countries, a large part of the women's labor force continues to be invisible with regard to official statistics, which do not adequately reflect women's productive work in the non-market economy. The ILO found that with a wider definition of "economic activity", female labor force activity rates rose from 13 to 88% in

*Special Adviser on Women Workers' Questions, ILO.

Jacques Maillard

India, and from 11 to 63% in Bangladesh. The official rates themselves indicate a rise in female participation: for example, from 24 to 29% between 1970 and 1990 in the Caribbean, from 49 to 54% between 1980 and 1990 in China. In East and Southeast Asia, women comprise up to 80% of the workforce in the export processing zones.

The key to efficiency

Women's labor force participation and productive employment hold the key to economic efficiency and growth at enterprise, national and international levels.

Technological innovations, in strengthening internationalization or globalization of the world economy, have created a new international division of labor in which women widely participate. Where competitive conditions have opened up employment opportunities, such as in manufacturing in the export processing zones, it is women who have readily supplied cheap labor. "They have been the cornerstone of labor-intensive industrialization and the main attraction for foreign investors."

Thus, since the beginning of the 1980s, women have contributed to the movement of offshore manufacturing towards such countries as the Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand or Hong Kong. Since 1985, investors have moved increasingly towards Indonesia, China, Bangladesh, India and Vietnam in search of more readily available and cheaper labor and often less stringent enforcement of labor legislation...

Efforts and flexibility

The ILO notes that, "it has been the 'added worker' effect of women's entry into the labor force that has enabled the majority of poor households to cope with falling real incomes in the global economic crisis". It has been the flexible allocation of women's time which has enabled families all over the world to fight against ever more threatening poverty.

While men's roles have tended to remain resistant to change and they are more likely to prefer to remain unemployed while searching for other wage employment, women, especially female heads of households, have seized any possibilities of work or income: permanent or insecure wage employment, homework or telework, part-time work, self-employment or community activities...

It is significant to note that women now participate widely in international migratory movements in search of employment, especially in Asia. For example, Philippina migrant workers outnumber their male counterparts by 12 to 1 in Asian countries, there are more than three female Indonesian migrants for every male migrant, and about three Sri Lankan female to every two male migrant workers. They enter, either legally or illegally, into the countries of the Middle East, into Japan, Singapore, Hong Kong, and also into Western Europe. They work as housemaids, nurses, helpers in retail shops and restaurants, and as entertainers. A number of them engage in prostitution. Their entry into international labor markets is, in fact, one of the most striking responses to the deterioration of domestic labor market opportunities and represents a family survival strategy.

The other side of the coin

The new and enlarged role played by women in the global and national economy is the positive side of the

HUNGARY: THE DREAM OF PART-TIME WORK

In her 35-year career in the Hungarian textile industry, Károlyné Pusztay knew only one enterprise. Starting as a seamstress there in 1960, she climbed the rungs one by one and for the last ten years

has been the head of her workshop.

"I worked very hard," she admits. "I wanted to attain a post where I could do something for others. I know very well that a management position is unimaginable without conflicts. I'm responsible for more than one hundred women. I love my profession; what I do pleases me."

Married and mother of a family – with a daughter and recently a granddaughter – Károlyné expended prodigious efforts to reconcile her professional activities with her household tasks. She admits that without the understanding and support of her husband, she would have been forced to interrupt her career. "For twenty years, I worked in a system of rotating teams. When my daughter was born, I went through a very difficult period. My husband helped me a lot at home, which permitted me to keep my job. Now I work according to a fixed eight-hour schedule, but in reality I stay much longer. When one holds responsibility, one has more work..."

Not only does her husband continue to be supportive, but her daughter too. "She did a lot so that I could keep my job, and she contributed to the family life. But now she needs help with my granddaughter. This is why I protest against deferring the right to a living allowance for women."

Károlyné's major problem is an insufficient number of workers in her enterprise. She attributes this to the low salaries and rigid working conditions. "We lack qualified workers and seamstresses because we cannot give them a salary as high as what they receive working at home in a system of small cottage industries. Moreover, I would like to have a good assistant so that once in a while I can spend the day, for example, to have something repaired at home. The system of home help only works in my country for families in which the woman or retiree is always at home. Part-time work would be a good solution for many women who work outside the home, notably in light industry; it would permit them to reconcile their two roles."

Part-time work is also the dream of Tasmané Fodor, manager of a small supermarket, who complains of very difficult working conditions. "The smaller the store, the worse it is. You have to simultaneously handle the cash register, take in deliveries, fill out forms and put things on the shelves. In winter you're cold, in summer it's too hot. During the month of August the temperature near the entrance is 35-40° C, in January my legs are nearly frozen. At my age, every person working in the retail trade has an illness, rheumatism, arthritis or trouble with the spinal column."

Tasmané feels that full-time work is unsuitable for the mother of a family, and that she should be able to work part-time. "Four hours a day would be enough for a mother with one or two children. I don't know if we can afford it. It would require that the boss pay us more per hour."

(Text and photos: Zsuzsa Orolin)

picture of the evolution during the last decade. The other side of the coin is the persistence of inequality and discrimination, and sometimes even an increase in both.

ILO surveys show that, "The feminization of employment has not been synonymous with improvement in the quality of employment." The greater the degree to which industries adopt flexible practices/technologies, the higher the proportion of total employment consisting of women who are normally relegated to the industrial periphery. Atypical forms of employment are notoriously precarious and are associated with low earning capacity and lack of training opportunities or promotion prospects.

More and more women are not covered by standard labor legislation and are not entitled to such social guarantees as minimal terms and conditions of work and social security. Even when legal provisions are available, the difficult economic situation is such that women workers are not likely to press for them. Those in the informal sector remain more likely than men to face difficulties in obtaining licenses, bank loans, training opportunities and access to organized markets.

At the same time, household and unpaid work remain a heavy burden, all the more so because structural adjustment has resulted in a cut-back in social support in the health and education sectors. In Ecuador and Nepal, for instance, women work longer hours than a decade ago in order to maintain the same incomes. Thus, it is most often women who bear the "hidden costs" of adjustment.

Female international labor migrants, especially those who do not enter a country through legal channels, are even more vulnerable than other female workers. Frequently uneducated and ill-informed, these women are victims

of unscrupulous agents who arrange jobs which often turn out to be in prostitution or which involve very long hours of hard domestic work.

A number of studies in the United States, Canada and Western Europe show that women who accompany their immigrant husbands are often not accorded the right to work. They go into homework or the informal sector where their illegal work status exposes them to exploitation and low wages.

Persistent discrimination

Summarizing the inequalities of which women in the world of work are victims with regard to Convention No. 111 of the ILO – Discrimination (Employment and Occupation), the ILO enumerates in particular:

- *Occupational segregation:* According to data for some 500 non-agricultural occupations in the United States, the United Kingdom and France, approximately 45% of the labor force is in jobs where either women or men make up at least 80% of the occupation. Even in countries, as in the United States, where women have broken into "male bastions", they are still segregated in the lower-status parts of these professions.
- *Differences in value accorded to jobs:* Most female-dominated occupations are characterized by low status, poor remuneration and limited opportunities for promotion or training. New generations of women are increasingly well-educated; yet many are still employed in "unskilled" occupations, in sales or services. When an occupation is opened to women, it is often because of the decline in its attractiveness.
- *Wage differentials:* In much of the industrialized world, women receive 70-80% of the hourly pay rates of men; in Japan and the Republic of Korea, they earn about half as much as men. On the other hand, a certain number of countries are considering doing away with the minimum wage on the grounds that it restricts labor market flexibility.
- *Discrimination in education and training:* In many developing countries, the occupational choice of girls – who often outperform boys in general education – remains limited because of a lack of employment orientation. Vocational training too often continues to be based on perceived "appropriate" skills for girls. Little has been done, moreover, to improve the human re-

"MY FAMILY IS MY WORK"

Giampaolo Brandi

Husnied Abdel Qadar, born in 1951, is Palestinian. She lives and works in the Balata Refugee Camp, near the town of Nablus (West Bank) where she has lived all her life. Officially the camp has a population of 12,000 but Husnieh says it is more like 20,000.

"In my capacity as a social worker and member of the Executive Committee for Women's Social Work, I coordinate the Committee's activities in this area for the West Bank's northern province which includes the towns of Nablus, Jinnin, Tulkaram and Qalqilja. We run kindergartens, small income-generating projects like processing foodstuffs, knitting and a small workshop to manufacture clothes for women and children. I also participate in policy-making in the General Federation for Women's Social Work.

One of my goals is to integrate the contribution of women into mainstream national action, raise their status in all fields and push them into every possible sphere through awareness-raising, training and education in health, legal affairs, etc."

Husnieh never married. Her education was cut short because of political "force majeure". She had to interrupt her studies in literature at the Arab University of Beirut. She is presently registered part-time at the Open University in Jerusalem to study Community Development. She does not linger too long over her personal life:

"I don't have a family of my own, but as a social worker, the whole refugee camp can be considered my family. And the camp has so many problems and there is such a dense population here that it takes all my time. For me, family and work are not two separate items. My family is my work".

Confirming this passionate and total dedication towards the condition of women among her people, she continues:

"These women have the same problems as women all over the world. I must say that the obstacles facing our women are due to tradition and not to Islam as many would like to believe. In our case, the liberation movement has emancipated us more than other Arab women. During the struggle we acted as both men and women: we were mothers and wives and at the same time wage-earners and fighters. We hope that this advantage will help further our rights. We do not want to repeat what happened in Algeria where women played an important role during the resistance but, after independence, they slipped back into their traditional roles in the kitchen."

"Our Palestinian society has great respect for women because of their involvement in the liberation struggle and their participation in economic life. Especially in rural areas, women take care of everything: outside work, the household, the family..."

Husnieh had been banned from leaving the Occupied Territories for 13 years. Her first trip out was to Turin, Italy in 1993, to follow a course at the ILO Turin Center, on entrepreneurship development, in order to enhance her skills in managing the clothes factory through new notions. She learned at the course about marketing, design, quality control and other aspects.

"During our course in Turin, we also discussed a pilot project of setting up an Arab Bank for women because we have more difficulty than men in obtaining credits. If we want to develop our economy, we cannot be dependent on Israeli products. We have to produce our own. There is a lot of scope here for women in setting up and managing small enterprises."

"We have often neglected our rights as women because we always had goals beyond our personal interests. These goals consisted of peace, liberation and independence. Now we want to take part in all the active committees. Our Constitution of 1988 does make provisions for this, but these have not yet been fully applied."

Niloufer Mukhi

JUSTINA, AN AYMARA MIGRANT IN EL ALTO

Justina Mamani is neither a union leader nor a militant feminist. Wearing a bowler hat and a full skirt, she dresses in the traditional manner of her people. She has a youthful face but marked by lines of fatigue. In her soft smile one can just discern a touch of resignation.

But this is a misleading impression. All you need is to start a conversation with her, and watch the expression in her eyes to be convinced of the unshakable will she possesses. At 24, Justina is married and a mother of four, and is above all a fighter firmly committed to improving her lot and that of her family.

Justina comes from the village of Puerto Acostain in the Bolivian Altiplano close to Lake Titicaca. Married at 18 she decided not to give in to leading the hard life of a peasant. Four years ago, accompanied by her husband and oldest daughter, Justina left the adobe house, the sparse fields of wheat, barley and broadbeans to try her luck in the city.

"Out there it was dirty, cold and there was no future," she states softly. They reached the large city of El Alto on the edge of the La Paz bowl, one of the biggest transit centers in the world for the uprooted rural poor: 700,000 inhabitants, 40,000 more each year, almost all are Aymara migrants from the Altiplano.

For 60 bolivianos per month – a little more than 12 dollars* – they rent a tiny lodging, without running water or heating, on the first floor of a building and share the courtyard with other tenants. There are now six of them who squeeze into the apartment, little Adélle having been joined by the twins Sonia and Bianca, and later by Jimena who is just a year old.

The children were delivered in the house since the family could not afford a hospital. There is no social scheme in the country to cover health costs. The twins' delivery was very difficult. "I thought I was going to die," sighed Justina. When asked whether she knew anything about planning births she replied, slightly embarrassed, that her children's doctor had promised to explain this to her.

In this city with a primitive infrastructure, living conditions are almost no better than those of the village.

Jacques Maillard

One has to pay for electricity, water (two barrels a day bought from a neighbor), clothes and, above all, the ever more expensive food. Justina's husband is a tailor's assistant and makes 150 bolivianos per month, frequently paid late. "There are times we are forced to borrow to be able to feed and clothe the children."

To improve the family income, Justina works... when she can and how she can. After having taken care of the children's needs, household chores and cooking, she does laundry for the neighbors making about 3 bolivianos per dozen shirts. Many other women go down to La Paz to sell a little fruit or odd objects in the street. "With my children, I can't do this", says Justina. There is no question of going to a child-care center; she could not afford the 25 bolivianos a month.

Just over a year ago she met some organizers of an NGO – Gregoria Apaza, the Center for the Promotion of Women – and she was able to learn weaving and clothes-making along with the basics of management and accounting. She has now completed her training and is part of a small group which makes clothes. Each article which is made and sold through the Center brings in around a hundred bolivianos. Besides the still very sporadic income, working in this group helps Justina to move away from her isolation and to exchange views at least twice a week with other women, some of whom face even more difficult situations: broken marriages, marital violence, and moral and psychological distress.

She comments skeptically on the eventuality of receiving help from the "higher-ups" to improve the state of affairs. "The Government can do nothing to help us. All we ask of it is to provide us with work."

A wide program and a cruel irony of dates: On the day of this interview, the Bolivian Parliament adopted a law – at the request of the Government and to the immense satisfaction of women's organizations – against family and domestic violence, the first of its kind in Latin America. This, of course, shows the authorities' preoccupation with the condition of women. However, it also proves that legislative measures, however well-meaning, cannot respond fully to the most fundamental needs of justice and dignity.

M.F.

* *1 dollar = 4.75 bolivianos*

source potentials of an entire generation of illiterate women who are still at an "economically active" age.

The way forward

The above observations on the persisting inequalities should not mask the real progress that has been made over the past decade with the growing awareness of the need for gender equality.

Many countries have adopted pay equity measures. Reductions between female and male wage differentials have occurred in some areas in addition to other improvements in working conditions and social protection for some categories of women workers. Affirmative action measures have been adopted by a number of governments, employers, trade unions and other relevant bodies to accelerate women's entry into leadership and managerial positions.

Furthermore, efforts, although inadequate, have been made to develop arrangements such as child-care facilities and parental leave provisions, to facilitate the reconciliation of work and family responsibilities. Appropriate legal measures, enterprise-level practices and guidelines have been adopted to prevent and address sexual harassment at the workplace. Various efforts are also ongoing to assist the vulnerable groups of women.

Owing to the cross-cutting nature of women workers and gender inequality problems in the world of work, the ILO advocates the adoption of a comprehensive integrated strategy for effectively addressing these problems.

The ILO is well placed to play a significant role in promoting such a comprehensive integrated strategy. Its tripartite structure permits it to marshall the support and collaboration of governments, employers and workers, and tripartite dialog in this endeavor. Its active partnership policy and the recent setting up of multidisciplinary teams in the different regions of the world strengthen the ILO's capacity for carrying out such integrated multidisciplinary work. The ILO's current action revolves around three main objectives: strengthening democracy, alleviating poverty and improving conditions of work and protection of workers. These priorities provide scope for dealing with the critical

EARNING A LIVING FAR FROM HER HOMELAND

"Bing", a 29-year-old Filipina has been working in Switzerland since 1988.

"I entered the country as a tourist, at the invitation of my two sisters, who are both married to Swiss citizens. But then I was able to get a job with a UN diplomat for 2 years. After those 2 years I did not want to go back to the Philippines, so I stayed on, without a work permit. I have many friends who live in the same situation. Some are maltreated by their bosses: they are not allowed to go to church on Sundays, some of them get only a salary of US$ 150 per month. Imagine, in Switzerland, how can one live on that! I am lucky, because I have a good job in a nice family. But I am always scared on the streets and in the bus, that I will be caught. Only this week, two of my friends were arrested by the Swiss police, because they don't have the right papers. If you don't have money to pay your ticket back home, you have to spend nine months in jail!"

"I have no real profession, but I graduated from high school. After graduation I lived with my mother (my father died back in 1976) and I worked as a sales girl with my aunt, who owns a little *sari-sari* store. The work was alright, but I could not stay with my mother and my brother who were always drinking and shouting at each other. My brother was always asking her for money. He also wanted money from me. Can you imagine the atmosphere in our house? I was glad to leave."

"Now I have saved a nice sum of money. I was even able to buy a house and a lot in the Philippines. I could go back if I wanted, but I don't want to be involved in the lives of my mother and brother again. I would lose all my savings within a few months to their beer drinking. In the Philippines you cannot ignore your family even if they are destroying your life. Nobody protects you from that. In that sense Switzerland is much better: here you are regarded as an individual, and you get a chance to develop yourself, no matter what family you come from. But I miss my country. I wish I could go back to build up my own life."

THE ILO: AN INTEGRATED STRATEGY

The effective tackling of the persisting problems faced by women workers, gaps and new challenges in gender equality in the world of work, as well as the acceleration of the pace of progress:

These issues urgently require the adoption and implementation of an integrated, comprehensive and proactive policy at the global, regional and national levels.

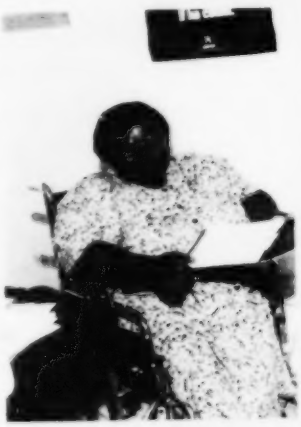
Such a policy should include the following elements:

- *A supportive legislative framework including the ratification and implementation of the relevant labor standards;*
- *gender-sensitive active labor market policies;*
- *gender-balanced training policies with emphasis on skill diversification and flexibility linked to the emerging opportunities in the labor market;*
- *enhanced women's access to the productive resources of credit, improved technology and markets;*
- *improvements in terms of job security, pay and other working conditions;*
- *equitable sharing of family responsibilities between men and women and adoption of other supportive measures to reconcile productive and reproductive activities;*
- *adequate social security and protection;*
- *women's increased mobilization in groups and representation in decision making;*
- *involvement of all the relevant actors and cooperation and coordination of their efforts;*
- *generation of an up-to-date gender-sensitive data, conceptual and analytical base.*

concerns of women and gender issues in the world of work. They also reflect some of the preoccupations of the Draft Platform for Action to be considered and adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, September 1995. Intensified action and commitment is required to make gender equality a reality in the twenty-first century. ❑

LAINAH, OR COURAGE IN A WHEELCHAIR

"Never give up fighting! Don't ever be discouraged. A disabled women has to fight to be considered as a human being like anyone else, and also to prove that disability can be synonymous with success in life." This is the message that Lainah Magama would like to pass on, from her wheelchair, to those in the world who suffer from a physical or mental disability. Her whole life stands witness to the energy she has invested to overcome her lot and unfounded prejudices.



Born 39 years ago in Zimbabwe in a middle-class family of agricultural workers, Lainah was an only child. She contracted polio at the age of 18 months and became paraplegic. Using his daughter's handicap as an excuse, her father divorced. Lainah and her mother moved to Zambia where Lainah continued her studies up to university entrance level. "I had to give up university due to lack of facilities for disabled people", she explains. "There was no access available for the disabled to enter the library."

Fortunately, sponsored by a United Nations training program, she was able to go to the Philippines where she obtained a Bachelor of Science degree in architecture and a Masters degree in urban and regional planning. She returned to Zimbabwe in 1983.

"I started to work for a local authority as an architect. After six months of designing public toilets I had had enough. I went straight to my director to tell him that my talent was under-utilized and I asked him for something more challenging to do. I was then given a more interesting job in construction. But with my handicap, it was impossible for me to visit the building sites to supervise the work. I obtained a transfer within the same authority and worked for three years in the town planning department..."

After a certain period of time, she felt she deserved a promotion, which she was refused. "People already felt they had done me favor by employing me", she says bitterly. She applied for many jobs but was unsuccessful in obtaining employment. Then she found an advertisement for the position of national coordinator for an ILO project on "Improved livelihood for disabled women". She applied for the job and got it, and worked for five years until the end of the project.

Having gained confidence and international experience, Lainah now works as an associate social services officer with the UNHCR in Harare. But always wanting to improve herself, she went back to further studies. She is hoping to obtain a diploma in travel and tourism as she would like to start her own business in tourism.

Lainah is married and has no children. Nonetheless, she finds it very difficult to combine her professional life, her studies and her family life. The most important thing for her is to prove her worth to everyone and to change people's mentalities. "Even with the best legislation nothing will change unless the mentality and the perception people have of women are changed. Not only the mentality of the men needs to be changed but also the mentality of women when educating their children about gender division of tasks."

From the 's to the '

Equality, development and peace: this is the general theme of the Fourth World Conference on Women, to be held in Beijing, 4-15 September 1995, on the initiative of the United Nations to adopt the Platform for Action.

Ten years after the adoption in 1985 in Nairobi of the "Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women Between Now and the Year 2000", the Beijing Conference will review the progress achieved and identify strategies for tackling the critical areas of concern which include alleviating women's poverty, eliminating violence against women, and promoting their economic independence and full participation in decision-making and power structures.

Intense preparation

In addition to the enormous gathering foreseen in the Chinese capital (some 40,000 participants are expected) and the ensuing media coverage, it is the intensity and scale of the preparatory work which impart an exceptional character to the event.

Since the General Assembly of the United Nations decided in December 1992 to convene this Fourth World Conference on Women, there has been considerable preparatory work for it undertaken at the national, regional and international levels. Conferences, seminars, colloquia, studies, publications and reports have succeeded each other at a sustained rhythm with a view to examining and highlighting all aspects of the position of women at the threshold of the year 2000. The coordination of this work was assured by the UN Division for the Advancement of Women, appointed as Secretariat for the Conference.

trategies' of Nairobi platform' of Beijing

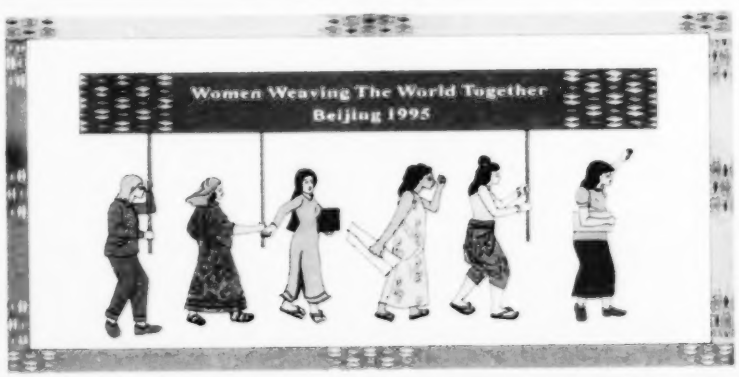
Among the regional preparatory meetings were the regional conferences organized in 1994, in Djakarta (Indonesia) for Asia and the Pacific, in Mar del Plata (Argentina) for Latin America and the Caribbean, in Vienna (Austria) for Europe, in Amman (Jordan) for the Arab States and in Dakar (Senegal) for Africa. Each of these adopted a regional platform for action depicting the concerns of the region.

One of the main UN publications is the *1994 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development*, which bears the mark of the relevant United Nations institutions, including the ILO. The key document to be considered for adoption by the Beijing Conference is the Draft Platform for Action.

Ten strategic objectives

After defining the global framework of measures to be taken, and identifying the critical areas of concern, the draft Platform for Action lists ten strategic objectives:

- Enable women to overcome the persistent and increasing burden of poverty.
- Ensure women's access to quality education and training at all levels and in all fields, and to health care and other similar services.
- Eliminate violence against women.
- Increase the participation of women in conflict resolution, and protect women in armed and other kinds of conflict and in foreign occupation.
- Promote women's economic self-reliance including access to employment, appropriate working conditions and control over economic resources – land, capital and technology.
- Strengthen factors that promote the full and equal participation of women in power structures and decision-making at all levels and all areas.
- Integrate gender equality dimensions into policy and program planning and implementation.
- Apply and enforce international standards to promote and safeguard women's rights.
- Enhance the role of the traditional and modern communications media to promote awareness of equality between men and women.
- Promote action to develop the mutual responsibility of women and men to achieve equality.



Weaving is an art practised mainly by women and it is a source of income for them. More than this, it is an expression of their lives, their love and their aspirations.

A 20 km. long ribbon made of pieces woven in different regions of the world will be sewn together for the opening of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. This symbol expresses the unity of women around the world and the voice of the poorest and most destitute among them.

The project is coordinated by KHEMARA, a Cambodian NGO. The ribbon will be primarily made by women who will not be present in Beijing. Therefore, a photo exhibition and a video on the weaving process will bring the faces of the weavers and organizers to the Conference.

The ILO's contribution

The ILO Governing Body recommended that the Organization participate actively in the preparations.

- *At the national level*, the ILO encouraged labor ministries and workers' and employers' organizations to participate in national level activities including the preparation of the national reports for the Conference.
- *At the regional level*, the Organization provided technical inputs on women's employment to the preparatory conferences organized by the UN Regional Economic Commissions. The ILO itself convened numerous workshops, seminars and tripartite meetings in 1994 in the different regions on, inter alia, the impact of economic restructuring on employment, training and working conditions, policies and strategies for promoting women's entrepreneurship, equality of opportunity and treatment for workers with family responsibilities, problems of women workers in the Arab countries, problems of employment, training, equality of opportunity and treatment, and working conditions, and a European Seminar on women and work.
- *At the international level*, the ILO has provided technical inputs to the various UN system-wide documents and preparatory efforts for the Fourth Conference. The ILO implemented a major multidisciplinary research initiative called the Interdepartmental Project on Equality for Women in Employment, which has generated considerable data and insight to guide the elaboration of relevant action for the future. Furthermore in 1994, it organized an International Forum on Equality for Women in a Changing World and a Tripartite Meeting of Experts on Social Security and Social Protection: Equality of Treatment between Men and Women.

A number of publications, working papers and information-dissemination activities have also been undertaken by the ILO towards this World Conference.

The ILO will be represented in Beijing by a large high-level delegation. ⌟

Out of the shadows towards global recognition

Women represent 90 per cent of homeworkers. Invisibility, lack of access and control over resources and means of production, as well as the absence of social protection are the central issues confronting homeworkers struggling to survive under sub-standard working conditions for minimal wages. The ILO is meeting the challenge of improving their lot through practical action and viable strategies and envisages the adoption of a Convention to guarantee them minimum protection.

"Waiting to be heard but reluctant to speak." Women homeworkers are just beginning to move away from the shadows where they have been confined for years. In many countries, they are a category of workers whose contribution to the national economies has not been quantified and recognized fully.

Producing goods or providing services for an employer or contractor with the work carried out at a place of the worker's own choosing, often the worker's own home, is home work. There is no direct supervision by the employer or contractor and the employer-employee relationship is difficult to establish. As a category of workers, homeworkers are among the most exploited because they belong to the unorganized sector.

The report on home work to be presented to the next session of the International Labor Conference (6-23 June) identifies the very low levels of remuneration as the most crucial single issue facing homeworkers. Their wages are almost universally based on the piecerate system which tends to lead to excessively long working hours, the employment of a concealed army of unpaid "assistants" and child labor. They are outside the scope of existing social security schemes and are cut off from the enterprise by a network of agents, contractors, subcontractors, middlemen and intermediaries. They work as and when orders come in, are forced out of work when there is none and normally accept rates of pay that are well below the going rates for unskilled labor.

Home work is prevalent in both rural and urban areas. The deregulation of labor markets, the globalization of production and the development of regional trade agreements is resulting in an increase in the number of homeworkers, both in developing and industrialized countries. In the Third World, particularly in the poor countries of Asia and Latin America, many women involved in home work are female heads of households and therefore are the main economic providers for their families. They remain invisible in statistics and outside the reach of technical assistance programs. The ILO considers them as a category in special need of assistance.

Pilot projects in Asia

"My muscles are painful, I feel stressed and suffer symptoms of influenza and physical strain." Other embroiderers in her village of Gondong in East Java, Indonesia, suffered deteriorating eyesight. Little did Ibu Yayuk realize that her symptoms were related to her constant sewing of garments and embroidery at home. All she cared about was to finish her orders so she could collect some money to buy food for her children and family. Most piece-rates for these women were two to six per cent of the retail prices in the marketplace.

INDUSTRIAL STANDARDS

The question of home work was placed on the agenda of the 82nd session (June 1995) of the International Labor Conference with a view to setting up and adopting new international standards in 1996.

The aim of the ILO in this domain is not to impose a rigid legal structure, but to provide guidance in adopting a realistic and flexible approach to problems posed by the situation of homeworkers.

For this reason, in light of the replies which were received from member States to an ILO questionnaire, the proposed conclusions suggest the adoption of a brief Convention putting forth the general principles of the policy to be followed and a more detailed Recommendation studying the implementation measures of this policy.

Each country having ratified the Convention should undertake to adopt a national policy on home work aimed at improving the situation of homeworkers, in consultation with the most representative organizations of employers and workers and, where they exist, with organizations concerned with homeworkers and those of their employers.

The aim should be to promote equality of treatment between homeworkers and other wage earners, taking into account the special character of home work.

The draft text lists six areas in which equality of treatment should be applied in each case:

- **The right of homeworkers to establish and join organizations of**

Mario Trajtenberg

In poor countries, most of the women who are homeworkers are heads of household and, as a result, are the main breadwinners for several adult or child members of the family.

Ibu Yayuk and the garment workers in her village did not receive any assistance from government or non-governmental organizations. Now that they have formed an association, they are finally able to express themselves and move out of their isolation.

Starting in the mid-eighties, the ILO tested and developed strategies at the country and sub-regional levels to improve employment prospects and terms of employment of homeworkers. Research and pilot technical cooperation programs were initiated in South Asia (India and Pakistan).

Against this backdrop the ILO initially collaborated with the Self-employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India, which successfully helped homeworkers gain some measure of social protection. Spurred by this fruitful experience and with the support of the Government of Denmark (DANIDA), the ILO embarked on a three-year project, from 1988 to 1991. This project was later expanded to a second phase lasting until 1994, to assist women homeworkers in Southeast Asia (Philippines, Thailand and Indonesia).

After carrying out a series of preliminary studies, the subregional project based in Bangkok began looking into the situation of homeworkers in these project countries. These studies led to practical action aimed at awakening women homeworkers to their vulnerable plight – being invisible, unorganized, and without access to and control over resources and social services – and alleviating it. The campaign for social protection of women homeworkers is a tripartite concern of the government, trade unions, intermediary and grassroots organizations, and the homeworkers themselves. In each of these countries, the project has its SEWA equivalent. Together with the ILO's help, the newly-found advocates charted a course for action and assistance to the homeworkers.

Two-pronged strategy

Through the ILO pilot programs, a two-pronged strategy has been developed and successfully tested. It combines employment promotion on the one hand and productivity-enhancing measures and conditions of work on the other. It is based on the fundamental principle that bargaining for higher remuneration and social protection should not at any time jeopardize the employment opportunities that home work provides. This type of work expands rapidly when high unemployment and poverty are prevalent. In spite of poor conditions of work

IN THE WORKS

eir own choosing and to participate their activities;

- **protection against discrimination employment and occupation;**
- **protection in the field of occuational safety and health;**
- **remuneration;**
- **social security protection;**
- **access to training.**

National laws and regulations, notes e proposal, should specify the types work which should be prohibited to omeworkers for reasons of health and afety. They should also determine hether and under what conditions the mployer may use intermediaries.

Respect of the laws and regulations pplicable to home work should be nsured by a system of inspection, nd adequate penalties for their violation should be provided for and effectively applied.

The proposed conclusions with a view towards a Recommendation note in particular inspection modalities for home work (a register of employers, a register of workers, records of work given out, powers entrusted to labor inspectors...); minimum age for home work (according to national laws and regulations); measures ensuring the rights to organize and to bargain collectively; minimum wage rates; guidelines concerning safety and health precautions, together with hours of work, rest periods and leave.

Other measures have also been foreseen, such as social security and maternity protection; protection in the case of termination of employment; resolution of disputes and programs to assist homeworkers.

and low remuneration, home work often represents a valuable source of employment and income and is sometimes the only source of employment in depressed areas.

Apart from information and national awareness-raising campaigns, one of the main objectives was strengthening the organizational basis of homeworkers. In this regard, aid should enable women to build self-confidence, acquire legal literacy training and negotiating skills. Moreover, it will be necessary to encourage trade unions and employers' organizations to take up the issue of homeworkers and to participate in action plans.

To enable women to create alternate income possibilities for themselves, they require entrepreneurship development assistance, including credit, marketing skills and managerial training.

Finally, particular attention should be paid to occupational safety and health conditions, innovative social protection schemes including housing funds and sickness benefits, and a review of existing legislation.

The pilot ILO-assisted programs in Asia demonstrated the feasibility of the approach and the real gains which can accrue in attaining both objectives of employment promotion and social protection. The strategy is now being expanded to Pakistan, Vietnam, Bangladesh, Malaysia and also to India, thanks to active support from the Government of the Netherlands. These activities present a potential for application in other parts of the world, Latin America for instance.

From sewing to leadership

"My mother was a homeworker; my father, a farm tenant. I had only two years of formal schooling and started working at age ten, after my father's death. I began to sew at home when I turned 15, and have been sewing since then", says Antonina Tiña. "Now I am 51 years old, married and have two children, and I have responsibilities at a national level."

Antonina is national coordinator of the PATAMABA association, one of the two homeworkers' organizations in the Philippines. She learned to sew to help her mother raise the family. In her first months of work she earned about 8 to 10 pesos a week. After subtracting the cost of thread and of machine rental, she was left with five pesos a week.

Lack of education proved to be a real handicap in negotiating with the subcontractor and Antonina promised herself that her children would receive an education.

She was one of the first to be involved with the militants for a better deal for homeworkers and moved up the rungs of the organization's ladder. She persuaded the women to join hands in uplifting their working and living conditions and took an active part in advocating change. This enabled her to broaden her horizon and that of her organization beyond national boundaries.

Because of PATAMABA, she was able to travel to foreign lands she had never dreamed that she would visit. In India, she realized that homeworkers could accomplish a lot as long as they believed in their organization. "There, even illiterate women were able to set up a bank. In the Philippines, most homeworkers can at least read and write. We can do as much, even more", she added with determination.

Group and organize for change

She believes that it is only through an organization that homeworkers can attain social protection. "It is difficult to be a leader in an organization. I do not expect material gain or personal happiness as a reward for my involvement. All I want is change in the condition of homeworkers. That would be like giving me a crown".

These experiences have fed into the international debate on home work and into ILO's standard-setting activities *(see box)*. The ILO aims to provide the leadership, through a staged and flexible approach, to multiply the number of success stories and bring the homeworkers out of the shadows into the light. ❑

Jacques Maillard

Among the measures envisaged by ILO standards in preparation are modalities for a fixed minimum wage for homeworkers.

Kiran Mehra-Kerpelman

Returning to work: A challenge for women

Uta Klein*

Problems of compatibility between professional and private life are usually resolved to the detriment of women. With few exceptions, it is women who interrupt their careers when family obligations require such a choice. Their reintegration into active life poses problems but it is necessary not only as a basic human right but also for economic efficiency.

Jacques Maillard

A long absence from the workplace creates a gap between initial training received and the exigencies of new professions which are rapidly evolving.

The equality of women and economic efficiency are entirely compatible, notes a study by a group of experts of the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) entitled "Women in the structural change of the Nineties". Moreover, the study confirms that the solution of certain economic problems depends on the participation of women, who constitute an untapped potential both in terms of quality and quantity.

In western Germany alone, 2.5 million women who abandoned their professions for family reasons hope to find a long-term job. Their number has quadrupled in eight years. Certain measures of social policy favoring the family and professional activity have stimulated this new demand. The law on parental educational allocation, for example, allows an interruption of work for up to 36 months and guarantees employment afterwards.

According to a study of the Research Institute for the Job Market (IAB), 1.4 million women, which is 12 per cent of the active population of German women, could find a job in 1992 after interrupting their career for at least six months.

Family and profession

In nearly all the countries of Western Europe – and the world – it is up to women to harmonize family duties with their professional activity, even if family values and structures and the economic and social conditions are different. The numbers relating to part-time work prove this. According to the Office of Community Statistics, 81.8 per cent of part-time workers in the European Union in 1990 were women. On average, 28 per cent of the women in the Union work part-time (one-third in Germany, 42 per cent in the United Kingdom, 59 per cent in the Netherlands, 25 per cent in France and Belgium). Part-time work is not often desired and has negative consequences for a possible career. However, sometimes it is the only form of employment which provides job opportunities to women.

The inadequacy of child-care services impedes the professional activity of mothers. In 1990, only 3 per cent of children under three years of age found a place in a public day-care center in

* *Sociologist, University of Münster (Germany).*

Germany (against 48 per cent in Denmark, 25 per cent in Belgium, and 20 per cent in France). Over 26 per cent of German women who would like to return to work estimate that the lack of child-care centers is the main obstacle.

Reintegration problems

In general, women who reintegrate into active life are well-qualified: in Germany, 80 per cent have completed vocational training. The main problem is the shortage of jobs and especially posts matching their abilities. Working hours are not very flexible and child-care facilities are inadequate. As a result, women must often accept tasks at a level below their capacities and training.

Problems concerning qualifications can nevertheless occur. Many professions pursued primarily by women tend to undergo significant technological changes; descriptions of job tasks change. A long absence from the workplace creates a gap between initial training and new demands. Rehabilitation is even more difficult when the interruption in professional activity is prolonged.

In women under 40 years of age, a "family phase" of five years or more has become rare. Pauses become shorter and shorter as women tend to turn more resolutely towards active life.

Few countries in the European Union have proposed specific rehabilitation programs. Germany offers the most complete range: consultation offices are now established within the framework of a pilot project of the Ministry of Youth and Women's Affairs, and there are special allocations for employers during the adaptation period, if they guarantee ultimate hiring. France and Luxembourg have proposed fairly similar programs. The European Union also has facilitated rehabilitation, notably within the framework of the project NOW (New Opportunities for Women) which finances reintegration programs.

The role of enterprises

For enterprises, a certain number of existing prejudices impede the hiring of women who seek re-employment. Fears arise of a reduction in technical capability and a lesser professional commitment due to family obligations. Nevertheless, there are enough arguments favoring the reintegration of women.

"EVERY DAY IS AN ADVENTURE"

That is how a participant in a vocational reintegration and skill diversification project described her experience as a bus driver in the German city of Münster. "Women in front" is a project launched by the Münster ANPE in close collaboration with a women's group and public transportation authorities. Twelve women were trained as bus drivers and are already working part-time.

This vocation is – at least in western Germany – always considered as reserved for men only. When the project was launched, there were only six women among the 288 bus drivers of the city's public transportation. Given the great success of the project (which was monitored by the Institute of Sociology of the University of Münster), a second training cycle has already begun.

If the costs of training and hiring new employees are calculated, it appears more judicious to keep those women already working, over the long term, even beyond a "family phase". The enterprises which have attempted this have judged their experience to be rather positive. They especially extol the strong professional motivation of those concerned. Implementation of programs in this domain also improves the image of the enterprise.

Jacques Maillard

Child-care facilities are absolutely necessary in order for women to continue working in a profession and to harmonize work and family life.

All those who strive for equality of women in enterprises must think of new models for allocating work time. Moreover, employees of both sexes should benefit from vocational retraining programs during the interruption of their activity. Too few enterprises meet this need of inactive employees to remain in contact with their former posts and upgrade their skills.

It is perhaps even preferable that the mothers and fathers concerned remain under contract by working part-time or on specific projects. The enterprise could consider offering continued training to qualified employees during their "family phase" in order to avail themselves of a permanent source of qualified personnel.

Concerning child care, a study of the German Institute for the Economy reveals that from the enterprise's viewpoint, extended child-care facilities would have positive effects for the employment of mothers and fathers. Even if it does not seem desirable to free the State from its obligation to propose and finance possibilities for child care, the establishment of child-care centers within enterprises should be encouraged. Bayer, Deutsche Bank and Schering have set an example in Germany. In the event that the potential numbers prove to be inadequate, kindergartens common to several different enterprises could be an option. The child-care center of Siemens in Munich accepts not only the children of its own employees, but also those of the neighborhood.

Everyone recognizes the importance of ensuring that children's education is not left up to women only. Likewise, the question of allocation of work time must not be a problem exclusively for employees of the female sex. Men and women who have children now want to harmonize work and family life. These new hopes must be respected and the "normal" work contract re-examined. Above all, better protection for part-time employees is needed, and equal treatment for all in matters of paid leave and retirement.

Too often, militants for equality of opportunity, representatives of works councils and employers themselves still have a tendency to think only in terms of active and full-time employees. It is time that these mentalities change and that the horizon widens. Those who wish to return to work after an interruption must no longer be limited in their professional and private aspirations for social advantages which they deserve by right. ❑

WOMEN AT THE ILO: PARTICIPATION REMAINS INSUFFICIENT

In conformance with the principles of equality put forth in its Constitution, the ILO has continued to insist, each time more strongly, on the necessity to improve women's levels of participation in the meetings which it organizes.

According to a recent study*, this participation is still much too feeble. Little progress has been made in 75 years, especially at the level of the ILO's supreme authority which is the International Labor Conference.

At its first session (Washington, D.C., 1919), there were no women delegates; of 135 technical advisors, 22 were women, which is 16.3%. At the eightieth session in 1993, women represented 13.9% of the delegations, delegates and advisors; 54 delegates out of 585 (which is 9.2%) were women.

If a study is made of women's participation at the Conference since 1975 – the date of the adoption of an important ILO Declaration on equality of opportunity and treatment for women workers – continuing up to 1993, a striking stability becomes evident: 13% in 1975, 14% in 1985, 13.9% in 1993. It is the governmental delegations which are the most "feminized": 16.9% in 1993 against 12.5% within the trade union delegations and 9.1% in the employers' ranks.

The States which in 1993 posted the best scores for women's participation in the ILO Conference are ranked in the following order: the ex-Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia (100%), Jamaica (42.9%), Iceland, Lithuania and Surinam (40%), Canada (38.9%), Denmark (38.1%), New Zealand (36.4%). Of the 153 member States represented at the 1993 Conference, 52 (which is 34.6%) did not include a woman in their delegations.

Jacques Maillard

The delegation of Denmark at a recent ILO Conference: an example set by too few at present.

"The Office," the study acknowledges, "has no direct means *per se* of intervening in the choice of participants designated by its constituents. A tripartite institution, the ILO expects each member State invited to a meeting to send representatives appointed by its government, employers' and workers' organizations." However, the Office has strived for many years to influence the choice of its representatives, notably by strongly emphasizing in its letters of invitation on the importance of women's participation. Since 1993, an informal meeting is organized during every Conference to honour women delegates.

Within the Office itself, the movement towards greater participation and holding of responsibility by women has clearly accelerated during the last ten years. The percentage of women holding posts in the professional and higher categories, which had long remained stagnant (16.6% in 1964, 14% in 1974, 16.5% in 1984), has grown to 28% as of the end of 1994. Of three Deputy Directors-general, two are now women.

Nevertheless, there is progress to be made, notably with a view to a more equitable distribution of posts of responsibility. With the exception of the two high-level posts mentioned above, the percentage of women diminishes as the scale of grades rises: 67.6% at the P2 level, 46.2% at the P3 level, 33.2% at the P4 level and 12.6% at the P5 level. Of the 79 employees involved in management, only nine are women.**

* *Women's Participation in ILO Meetings*, by Claire Bangasser, ISBN92-2-209377-1.

** See document GB 262/PFA/11, submitted at the 262nd session of the ILO Governing Body.

Towards a wider professional horizon

"Women deserve to be in the mainstream of the world of work. They should be provided with more work options than are made available to them currently." In the interview which she gave to the* World of Work, *Mrs. Maria Nieves R. Confesor, Secretary of Labor and Employment of the Philippines, and Chair of the ILO Governing Body, describes her personal journey, enumerates the measures taken in her country to promote women's work and indicates the road to follow at the international level.

Jacques Maillard

Maria Nieves Roldan-Confesor is 45 years old. She is married and has two children. After extensive literary studies, she specialized in Business Administration at the Ateneo University of Manila and then in Public Policy and Administration at Harvard University. She obtained degrees from both Universities.

While continuing to be an Associate Professor at the Maryknoll College, she has spent most of her career, since 1976, at the Department of Labor and Employment of the Philippines, moving up the ladder all the way to her current ministerial functions since 1992. She has participated in the International Labor Conference since 1982 and has headed the Government delegation of the Philippines since 1991.

World of Work: ***You occupy high-level functions at the national as well as the international level. Can you describe your ascent to this level of responsibility?***

– *Mrs. Nieves Confesor:* Having risen from the ranks to the highest position at the Department of Labor and Employment in 1992, I feel that the years of nurturing its growth have taught me much, especially in the areas of labor relations, workers' welfare and protection, and employment, particularly overseas. Being at the helm now caps my whole career in the civil service.

It took a lot from me, being a woman, to reach this summit. Hard work. Determination. Guts. But I wish people would stop talking as if it were a strange thing for a woman to be appointed Labor and Employment Secretary. Personally, I feel this should make other women strive harder in their respective fields. Gender has nothing to do with it. For it has been said that the secular will to achieve, to triumph, is not a flowering alone in the restricting world of male chauvinists. It is a birthright for all.

On the other hand, my recent election as Chair of the ILO Governing Body is a significant honour to the Philippines as an active member of the world labor body. It recognized the Philippines in the field of diplomacy and international labor relations as well as demonstrated other countries' esteem and respect for the Philippines.

My experience with international negotiations on labor issues had prepared me for this new post and has made me even more aware of labor in a global perspective. I must now also deal with larger policy issues with global implications. And since it is human beings – real people, warm bodies – that we are dealing with, I should be more aware of the various social issues which underpin labor and the more commonly known issue of labor migration.

– ***How do you combine your work with family-oriented duties and personal life?***

– On weekends, when I am free from work and any commitments, I am a typical homebody. I find happiness in cleaning the house, especially the cabinets. It serves as my therapy. Nowadays though, I regard lazing around the house as luxury, and reading my favorite books (Steinbeck, Rio Alma, the classics) in an old pair of shorts and shirt.

I am also a mother and a wife. My main concern is to make sure that there is a strong center in the lives of my husband, Rod, and my two children – one that can keep the family together. And this center should be filled with love, a place that nurtures and nourishes. ... It operates full-time and round-the-clock to let them know that if anything happens, I will always be there for them to fall back on.

Mothering to me is something very critical since my children, Cara Christina, 17 years, and Luis Miguel, 12 years, are now at the stage when it is a little difficult for them – adolescence. I guess they will be needing more of my presence so I will have to re-do my schedule. But I'm guided by one principle: one has to be cruel to be kind. Basically, I'm not strict nor super lenient.

At this point, all these things about "letting go," how strict I should be with

my children, and other similar concerns, now have suddenly become very real to me. Nonetheless, I am thankful that my husband is always there to take on the many challenges of parenting. It has always been a joint effort ever since, and it has been a negotiation throughout our years of married life.

A personal wish is to be remembered as having given my children as many opportunities and options to choose from. At the same time, having given them the basis for making a choice, I hope to give them the strength to make these choices.

– ***Do you think that the conditions of work for women have evolved in your country? How would you describe the progress in the status of women and their achievements in the last 10 to 20 years in the Philippines?***

– Statistics show that the status of Filipino working women has significantly improved in the last two decades. An increase is noted in the female labor force from 3.9 million in 1970 to 9.9 million in 1993, or an increment of 6 million. The labor force participation rate increased from 30.5 percent to 48.4 percent for the same period.

However, the employment share of women in industry has been declining from 43.4 percent in the seventies to 30.9 percent in the nineties. The slump is observed to have been absorbed by the services sector.

Moreover, there has been a noticeable increase in the share of women workers in the different occupational categories, the biggest of which has been among professional, technical and related workers. The proportion of women workers in the administrative, executive and managerial occupations has similarly increased. There has also been an improved turnout of women graduates in the tertiary level of education. High learning skills acquisition seems to have motivated women to participate actively in the economy.

Another significant development is the decreasing percentage of women in the "unpaid family workers" category. More and more women are moving to wage or self-employment.

All these can be largely attributed to the policy environment which has increasingly been sensitive to women's issues and concerns.

The 1987 Constitution makes a direct reference to gender equality and makes an explicit recognition of the role of women in nation-building.

Provisions of the Labor Code on pre-employment, wages, hours of work, occupational health and safety, welfare facilities, labor relations and post-employment invariably apply to everyone. However, there are also provisions specifically applied to women due to acknowledged biological and social considerations.

Moreover, several laws have been promulgated over the past few years in order to strengthen the prohibition of any kind of discrimination against women in employment: the provision of criminal liability and sanctions against employers who discriminate against women; facilitating the practising of a profession by a married woman; promoting the development of the full potential of women workers; declaring sexual harassment unlawful in the employment, education and training environment.

– ***Apart from these legal dispositions, what are the other practical measures and programs being implemented to ensure equality in the field of work?***

– At the Department of Labor and Employment, we have initiated these programs:

● Women in Non-traditional Trades (WINT): This project involves the creation of a broader and more diversified range of occupations for women through skills training, such as welding and masonry. An evaluation of the project shows that women trainees fared well compared with men. In some cases, women even bested their male counterparts.

A shift is required in the strategies for the female labor force: less of the welfare-oriented support and more of exposure to production-oriented strategies.

● Training/Retraining: Skills training is provided for domestic workers to prepare them better for overseas jobs. Entertainers are also given retraining programs to provide them alternative employment opportunities in other trades.

● Women Workers Employment and Entrepreneurship Development (WEED): This project aims to create jobs and livelihood opportunities in the countryside by harnessing women's entrepreneurial abilities and maximizing their individual chances of success as entrepreneurs.

● Gender-sensitive statistics/researches: To provide a more accurate and comprehensive basis for policy formulation, labor and employment statistics are being split out according to sex.

– ***Does this mean that all obstacles to equality have been surmounted or are in the process of disappearing in the Philippines and elsewhere?***

– Certainly not. In their struggle to be recognized as productive co-partners in the labor market and in economic development, women still have to hurdle some obstacles. These include: gender-based bias in employment; women as secondary wage earners; discrimination in wages; the "protection-employment" paradox; low level of participation in trade union activities; vulnerability of women in the informal sector; undervaluation of the female contribution to productive employment.

– ***What solutions can you put forth for the future advancement of working women around the world?***

– Women deserve to be in the mainstream of the world of work and this means that they should be provided with more work options than are made available to them currently.

This requires a shift in strategies for the female labor force: less of the welfare-oriented support and more of exposure to production-oriented strategies, perhaps through broad institutional and technological interventions in order to increase women's productivity. This way, gender-based income differentials will also be reduced.

In like manner, employment and education/training policies have to be modified towards more gender-responsive human resources development planning. As such, a wider range of occupational choices should be made available for women. Thus, we need to seriously reconsider women's access to other forms of training. This approach may open up new jobs and occupations so as to increase women's earning capacity.

At the same time, the employment of women in new fields needs to be strongly promoted. Deliberate action to absorb qualified women trained in such fields should likewise be ensured. As more and more women enter formerly all-male occupations, conscious efforts should be made to avert the possibility of such occupations becoming feminized.

Another way of securing the future of working women is by strengthening the literacy and skills training of women, particularly in the rural areas. This has to be done because the lack of basic education or skill training is one of the main reasons for the low occupational mobility of women.

Finally, we have to promote alternative employment schemes for women which do not compete with family responsibilities. These will include home-based enterprises and self-employment. Hence, priority should be given to assistance in the form of access to markets, training, credit and resources. ⌟

Labor market deregulation, not a cure-all

The deregulation of labor markets is unlikely to resolve the unemployment and poverty now afflicting most industrialized countries. Although each element of labor market regulation should be examined and often adjusted, these regulations are not in themselves at the root of poor labor market performance.

As labor market regulation is not an underlying cause of the problem, it follows, argues the ILO's *World Employment 1995* report, that deregulation will not resolve it.

Proponents of deregulation have pointed to various features of labor market regulation in Europe – including strong unions, stringent employment protection, generous welfare provisions – as an explanation for high unemployment levels compared to the much lower ones prevailing in the relatively deregulated United States.

This comparison overlooks the fact that labor market performance has deteriorated in all OECD countries since the first oil shock of 1974 "irrespective of differences in labor market regulation", retorts the ILO report. The manifestations of this deterioration however have taken different forms: "rising inequality and falling wages in the less regulated United States labor market and high unemployment in the more regulated European setting".

"There is some justification", says the report, "for setting the concept of persistent unemployment in Europe against persistently stagnating incomes in the United States. In the long run, the dilemma would appear to be to choose between two forms of poverty."

High wages not responsible

The ILO rejects the analysis according to which high wages in Europe are directly responsible for high unemployment levels. Empirical evidence suggests that while this correlation was largely correct in the years immediately following 1974, "by the mid-1980s (...) this no longer held true, as countries abandoned automatic wage indexation mechanisms, and real wage moderation was such that wages trailed the continued growth of productivity". Though profit margins were restored, unemployment rates have failed to decline. This suggests that factors other than high wages are responsible for the persistence of high unemployment.

A closely-related argument focuses on the wage-setting institutions of industrial relations. Decentralized bargaining structures, according to some analysts, ensure a greater degree of wage flexibility – and hence more jobs.

This view, the report finds, is not borne out by available evidence. In the United Kingdom for example, despite a precipitous decline in union membership during the 1980s and 1990s, "real wages have increased at a higher rate than productivity growth," while "unemployment remains stubbornly over 2 million", a figure never reached in the 1950-1979 period, when union density was much higher.

"The theoretical advantages of open, decentralized competition in labor markets," adds the report, "must ultimately contend with the observation that the world's three most successful economies – the United States, Japan and Germany – all have vastly different institutional systems of wage determination, union density, levels of bargaining, coverage rates and patterns of economy-wide coordination."

The report likewise dismisses the association drawn by some between the existence of minimum wages and negative employment effects. "The bulk of empirical evidence largely finds the impact of minimum wage on unemployment to be insignificant," with the possible exception of France, the only industrialized country where the minimum wage rose relative to the average wage during the 1980s.

"The absence of rules does not automatically and unambiguously improve performance, nor does the presence of regulation unambiguously impede adjustment and worsen performance," says the report.

Non-wage labor costs

This conclusion does not, however, amount to "a myopic defense of the regulatory status quo". Some rules clearly must change to accommodate the very real demands for flexibility which both the problems of employment creation and the evolution of production systems imply. Rules relating to the length and organization of working time – those applying for instance to work performed in shifts, at night, on Saturdays and Sundays, to part-time and temporary employment – need to be reexamined. "There would seem to be scope for job creation through continued reform of regulatory and purely organizational

New systems of production require persons to acquire further training and as a result there is closer cooperation between employers and workers.

Jacques Maillard

constraints on the organization of working time."

It would also appear, says the report, "that the reform of existing systems of financing unemployment and other social security benefits through payroll taxes should be given serious consideration".

Noting that non-wage labor costs "represent a disproportionately higher share of the cost of employing a low-wage worker", the report advocates "the scaling down or elimination of non-wage costs" applying to them.

The report also acknowledges the existence of negative linkages between the generosity of unemployment benefit systems and the duration of unemployment. "The general order of magnitude is that a 10 per cent increase in benefits leads to a 3 per cent increase in the average duration of unemployment spells."

"The appropriate response to this problem", says the report, "may be to make it more profitable for firms to hire long-term unemployed." One of the options proposed is to use a portion of unemployment benefits as vouchers for employers who hire unemployed workers. "In this way unemployment benefit systems, which currently impose an implicit tax on work, would be a source of employment subsidies."

Methods of financing unemployment benefits also deserve attention. It is common to rely on payroll taxes levied on employers for this purpose. A better choice, suggests the report, would be to finance benefits through expenditure taxes (such as VAT) which "may generally be expected to have a smaller contractionary effect on labor demand: Expenditure taxes lead to lower labor costs and higher take-home pay than do payroll taxes".

Cooperation and participation

While a great deal of research has explored the down-side of labor market regulation, the report warns that, "the benefits of appropriate labor regulation have often been overlooked". Among the benefits is the fact that regulation often responds to market failures. "For example, individual firms that voluntarily offered sickness benefits might suffer the risk of adverse selection in attracting illness-prone workers. In the absence of regulation, they would not rationally offer such benefits. They would, instead, face a strong incentive to hire only young, healthy workers."

Employment security furthermore, "increases both the propensity of firms to train and the willingness of workers to invest in upgrading their skills". High performance workplaces in particular, "require an infrastructure of education and training, and willingness to retrain, which calls upon the traditional training function of trade unions".

"New production systems", the report underlines, "require extensive cooperation between labor and management and the participation of workers in business decisions from which they were previously excluded". In this context, "the decollectivization of labor-management relations that is implied in deregulation will be dysfunctional. In contrast, strong organs of workplace employee participation will yield significant benefits in terms of greater productivity and the rapid and efficient diffusion of new technology". ⌟

* World Employment 1995. An ILO report. *ISBN 92-2-109448-8* (see in this issue pp. 30-31).

Wiser policies for older workers

Peter Stalker *

World population is aging rapidly. That much is clear. What is less certain is what can, or should, be done about it. As the 1995 World Labor Report** from the ILO points out, many recent policy changes, on early retirement, for example, have proved expensive mistakes.

The demographic shift is dramatic. In 1950, people aged 60 years or over represented only 8 per cent of world population, but by 2025 they will be about 14 per cent. This is a consequence of developments at both ends of the age spectrum. At one end, fertility rates are falling: between 1950 and 1990, the crude birth rate for the total population fell from 38 to 27 births per thousand people. At the other end, people are living longer: over the same period life expectancy at birth rose from 46 to 63 years.

In many ways this is a cause for celebration – a sign of prosperity and social achievement. But there are also alarm bells ringing, in particular over what is called the "dependency ratio": the number of active working people available to support each non-working older person. In Western Europe this is expected to fall to around 1.5 by 2025. And while the problem is most severe for the older industrial countries, many of the same trends are evident elsewhere: in East Asia the old-age dependency ratio is expected to fall to around 2.4 by then as well.

Decline in labor force participation rates (Males 60-64 years)

Country	1970	1992	Decrease
Australia	75.6*	49.4	34.7
Austria	44.9*	13.8**	69.3
Canada	74.1*	48.7	34.3
Denmark	81.4	47.1**	42.1
Finland	63.1	28	55.6
France	54.3***	18**	66.9
Germany, East	83.4*	26.9**	67.7
Germany, West	69.4	35**	49.6
Ireland	87.6*	59.4**	32.2
Italy	40.6*	37.2**	8.4
Japan	85.8	75	12.6
Netherlands	74.8*	21.7**	70.9
New Zealand	69.2*	34	51.6
Norway	79	63.8	19.2
Portugal	79.1	56.2	28.9
Spain	74.2	46.2	37.7
Sweden	75.7	60.7	19.8
UK	86.5*	54.2**	37.3
USA	73	55.1	24.5

Source: ILO: Year Book of Labor Statistics, issues of 1974, 1975, 1979 and 1993.

** Figures relate to 1971 ** Figures relate to 1991 *** Figure relates to 1975*

The cost of retirement

But the increasing burden of old-age dependency is not just the result of population aging, it is also closely linked to changes in the "labor force participation rate": the proportion of people in a particular age group who are working, or wish to work. In recent years there has been a marked decrease in the participation rates of older workers; a trend that has been amplified by recession.

It is this combination of demographic, social and economic pressures which has provoked the current crisis – and is causing a re-think in policy. In particular there are serious doubts about the wisdom of encouraging early retirement. In a number of countries, such as Finland, Germany and the Netherlands, the average age of retirement has dropped to six years below the statutory pensionable age. In the Netherlands, for example, between 1960 and 1990 the participation rate for men aged 60-64 fell from 81 per cent to

* *Economist, consultant.*

23 per cent. This has proved doubly expensive: older workers have not only ceased to make an economic contribution, they have also had to be paid early retirement benefits.

But, as the Report points out, the doubts about early retirement go beyond issues of immediate cost. Some of the underlying assumptions are also questionable. It has conventionally been thought, for example, that early retirement makes economic sense because older workers are less cost-effective than younger ones – assuming that as they grow older their skills are outdated and their productivity falls, while seniority requires that they receive steadily higher pay. This may not be true: even if older workers do indeed earn more, their earnings do not necessarily continue to rise until the end of their working lives. Nor is the productivity question as clear cut as once thought. The Report contends that, in many cases, even when older workers cost more than their younger colleagues, this can be more than compensated for by the value of their accumulated know-how.

Jacques Maillard

The transmission of know-how from older workers to younger ones is an essential element – too often neglected – of the productivity of the enterprise.

Reversing the trend

It could be argued that, when jobs are scarce, older workers should still make way for the young. However, the Report finds that their withdrawal does not necessarily benefit younger workers. Referring to early retirement schemes in countries such as Belgium, France, Spain and the United Kingdom, it concludes that: "The total impact of such measures on the problem of youth unemployment was negligible. New entrants to the labor market often lacked the experience and know-how necessary for the jobs vacated by older workers. More often, the jobs just disappeared".

Most governments and analysts now believe that the early retirement trend has gone too far. This is primarily because of the high cost of pensions: in industrialized countries between 1960 and 1984, pension expenditure as a proportion of GDP more than doubled. And things look likely to get worse: in Germany by the year 2025, there may be more pensioners than employed people.

Reversing the early retirement trend will not be easy. According to the Report: "there is much speculation as to how this should be done, and skepticism as to whether it can be achieved". A few countries have, for example, decided gradually to raise the pensionable age, or to increase the minimum number of years of contributions needed to qualify for a full pension. Others have considered raising taxes or pension contributions. However, the Report also cites extensive research which suggests that governments may not have much influence over the retirement decisions of workers or enterprises.

Age and health

Parallel to the debate for and against reversing the early retirement trend is another one, centred on the difficulties which older workers encounter in coping with job requirements and the measures to enhance their working capacity and ease the transition from work to retirement. The call is for eliminating the occupational health hazards and working conditions which hasten the aging process and reduce the working capacity of older workers. Indeed, as the Report says, the very notion of age is being called into question. Chronological age is no longer seen as an indicator of when a worker should retire. Functional age or working capacity are considered more appropriate as an indicator of an older worker's ability to cope with the demands of a job. A physically fit older individual can outperform more sedentary younger people. A combination of health promotion, job redesign, training and improved working conditions, adapted to the needs of older workers, should make it possible for society to make better use of the capacities of these workers. It would also stem the tide of early retirement and the consequent loss and waste of experience and skills.

The Report notes that the solutions to the problems and questions that the demographic aging of the population brings forth are not exclusively in the hands of the public authorities, enterprises, or the social corps as a whole. Older workers, ever more numerous, will increasingly set forth and lay down their own demands. "A new identity of senior citizen is emerging, carrying with it notions of empowerment. They are a force to be reckoned with – and ready to take their future into their own hands." ❑

*World Labor Report 1995, ILO, ISBN 92-2-109447-2.

Go-ahead in the fight against alcohol and drugs

That employers and trade unions, as well as the public authorities, are concerned with the havoc wreaked by alcohol and drug abuse at the workplace is nothing new or surprising. The economic and human consequences of this scourge are enormous. During past years, priority was given to helping those affected. Urged by the ILO, the social partners are now placing the emphasis on a global preventive approach.

Alcohol is prevalent in both developing and industrialized countries. But within one generation drug abuse has spread everywhere, in the streets, in the schools, in the stadiums and in the workplace. The social costs are incalculable in terms of human tragedy, family disruption and rising crime.

In financial terms, substance abuse costs industry billions of dollars annually due to absenteeism, accidents and lost productivity. In fact, 20 to 25 per cent of work accidents involve intoxicated people injuring themselves and innocent victims. While men and women aged 20 to 50 are the most productive segment of the population, this age group also has the highest rate of alcohol consumption.

Thus it makes sense for the workplace to take an active role in preventing substance abuse. But not the traditional punitive approach that concentrates on weeding out problem employees. Why not focus instead on cultivating a healthy workforce in an environment that combines well-being with productivity? And why not integrate the family into the program as

CODE OF PRACTICE

Employers and workers should jointly assess the effects of alcohol and drug use in the workplace and should cooperate in developing a written policy for the enterprise. This is one of the key points in the landmark Code of Practice on the Management of Alcohol- and Drug-Related Issues in the Workplace, which the ILO's Governing Body endorsed at its 262nd Session in March.

The Code of Practice, which was finalized at a tripartite meeting of experts in January 1995 in Geneva, is not meant to supersede international standards or national laws. Instead, it provides pragmatic guidance to interested parties in order to protect the health and safety of workers as well as to ensure an enterprise's performance and competitiveness.

The Code adds that the enterprise should have a clear policy and that the same restrictions should apply to all levels of the hierarchy. Among the other key points:

- **Alcohol and drug problems should be considered a health matter and dealt with in a non-discriminatory way.**
- **Where it is indicated that certain job situations contribute to such problems, employers and workers should cooperate in identifying reasonably practicable solutions and take appropriate preventive or remedial action.**
- **Counseling, treatment and rehabilitation are preferred to disciplinary action when a worker's misconduct is associated with alcohol and drugs. If a worker fails to cooperate fully with the treatment program, the employer may take appropriate disciplinary action.**
- **Workers who seek treatment and rehabilitation should not be discriminated against by the employer and should enjoy normal job security and advancement opportunities.**
- **Holding a job is frequently an important factor in facilitating recovery from problems related to drugs and alcohol. Therefore, the social partners should acknowledge the special role the workplace may play in assisting individuals with such problems.**

In Egypt, a specialized group has been created by the Labor ministry to sensitize workers, using posters and leaflets, to the negative effects of alcohol within both the family and the enterprise.

well in order to reinforce the message?

This is the basis of the model programs to prevent drug and alcohol abuse among workers and their families being implemented within an innovative project jointly by the ILO, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations International Drug Control Program (UNDCP).

Wide experimentation

Five disparate countries, Egypt, Mexico, Namibia, Poland and Sri Lanka are taking part in the project. Their 250,000 participating workers come from virtually every sector including government, transportation, media, mining, hospitals, breweries, factories and chemical industries.

Midway through the five-year project, tangible results have already been reported. The absenteeism rate in some units of a Mexican company has dropped to less than 1.5 per cent. A government agency in Sri Lanka also noted reductions in absenteeism. Namibia is revising its civil service code on drug and alcohol abuse, and the Prime Minister has expressed support for the project. In Poland, 21 additional enterprises unexpectedly asked to join the program and have formed a satellite group.

The workplace is a practical arena for prevention programs. For one thing it has a captive audience. For another, it is a micro-community which provides a social network. Prevention activities rooted in the workplace can have a multiplier effect, spreading from employees to family members to the community. Success greatly depends on management commitment and workers' participation.

The project has four key elements:

- It provides a framework which promotes quality of work and health. Awareness campaigns are devoted to physical fitness, mental health, stress management and personal development.

> The philosophy is that prevention pays off. It is more effective to tackle the underlying causes of drug and alcohol use in the first place than to remedy problems later.

- Management takes the initiative. Since managers know their workers, they can define the needs of the enterprise better than outside experts can. They are given basic knowledge about substance abuse in order to set up effective awareness campaigns.

- It establishes "local ownership" at the national and enterprise levels. When a prevention program emanates directly from the workplace, it allows management and workers to identify the issues together.

- Families are involved. Workers' education activities are used as a conduit to the family.

The overall goal is to improve performance, productivity and workers' well-being. In turn this should lead to better products and services, smoother interpersonal relations and greater motivation. These are prerequisites if enterprises want to meet the demands of global competition.

Tackling the causes

As part of the program, each enterprise prepares a policy on substance abuse. The opportunities for personal

improvement serve as an incentive for workers to adhere to company policy. The philosophy is that prevention pays off. It is more effective to tackle the underlying causes of drug and alcohol use in the first place than to remedy problems later. Unpleasant working conditions or stress can be a factor in substance abuse. Or difficulties at home may lead to drugs or alcohol, which can affect job performance. Or friends may influence drinking and drug patterns.

The program develops core elements but the way the enterprises adapt these elements is significant. Certain components transcend cultural differences and geographical distances. For example, the traffic light with its green, amber and red signals is an ideal metaphor for describing a prevention program.

Green (go-ahead) symbolizes workers who are substance-free. Amber (caution) is for workers who are at risk from drugs or alcohol or from health or social problems and who require early assistance to return to the green zone. The red zone (danger) means people with addiction problems who need treatment and then reintegration into working life.

Most workers are in the green zone. Putting a priority on initial prevention (such activities as information, training and health promotion) and early assistance can minimize the need for treatment and rehabilitation.

National initiatives

The idea is to think green. It appears like a leitmotif throughout the activities.

In fact, Egypt has created a Green Office in the Ministry of Labor and Manpower which interacts with the enterprises. The Green Office is a strategic base for producing pamphlets and posters that advocate prevention. It then disseminates them locally as well as in the rest of the region. A special brainstorming group originates the ideas.

Meanwhile, green "thumbs-up" posters are appearing throughout the enterprises in Poland. They are juxtaposed with "thumbs-down" posters in red. The emphasis is on quality and both posters convey an instant visual message.

Poland already has a green-zone infrastructure because its laws stipulate that the municipal governments must collaborate with local enterprises to establish programs that promote health and welfare. For example, one chemical company is using its sports complex and employees' holiday centers to set up green-zone activities.

Work and family

This year the crucial family link is being introduced as an extension of the workplace programs. One universal factor is that the worker's income is essential for family prosperity. Drug and alcohol abuse diverts household expenditures and can disrupt family life, especially if the major income earner risks losing his or her job. The image chosen here is a flowering tree which symbolizes family development. Its roots are nurtured by the workplace and the community.

Mexico is drafting a manual on the relationship between workplace, family and community intended to serve as a prototype for the other countries in the project.

A Namibian enterprise has formed links with schools and has numerous family activities. In Sri Lanka, where enterprises traditionally have a strong family connection, one company has launched a poster contest for schoolchildren on the theme of work/family/substance abuse.

The countries will also gauge the impact on specific sectors. There are clusters of chemical companies from Mexico and Poland plus the maritime and transportation sectors of Egypt. In Namibia the largest diamond and gold mines are involved. Sri Lanka's garment industry has mainly women workers, which will provide a novel perspective for the project.

Tripartite advisory boards (workers, employers and government representatives) act as national steering committees for the project. Managers of all the participating enterprises are expected to form an Association of Resource Managers Against Drug Abuse (ARMADA) to ensure continuity of the action undertaken. ❑

Susan Epstein
Journalist

Working World

REFORM

● **Gabon** has recently revised its Labor Code, thus joining the reform movement on the African continent with its political and economic liberalization. By so doing, the new text establishes union pluralism. However, it differs from other revisions made in French-speaking Africa by maintaining the public monopoly of job placement and of prior administrative authorization for any layoffs attributed to economic reasons.

FACTS AND FIGURES

● **Self-employment** is often presented as a remedy for unemployment, but it does not provide shelter from poverty. A study undertaken in the U.K. by the Institute of Manpower Studies shows that the range of incomes is wide-open and their distribution is very much centred around self-employed workers. They run the risk of becoming part of the poorest 10% of the population which is a risk three times greater than that of salaried workers. Women, young people and the long-term unemployed are the most threatened. Moreover, inequality is perpetuated: once they have retired, self-employed workers who are poor receive very low pensions, having acquired fewer rights.

● **Private pension funds** established in Argentina have released their return rates for the first six months of operation – an average of around 3%. Out of 26 funds, 21 had return rates higher than inflation (3-4% in 1994). The four best returns ranged from 7.6% to 4.7%, five had rates of about 4%, six of about 3%, seven around 2%, two just maintaining the value of their capital and two others suffered losses. In Peru, the funds reached 68% of their annual objective, with 952,444 enrolments in 1994; it is estimated that it will take six years to cover two million persons.

DIALOG

● **In the United States**, the unions and management of enterprises in the iron and steel industry, where the majority of the capital is held by the personnel, have just created a joint institute, the Worker-Ownership Institute. Its task will be to assist and train union leaders of these enterprises. Companies taken over by their employees are often in delicate situations; they will now be able to benefit from the successful experiences of others.

● **Morocco** – where freedom of association is far from guaranteed – has set up an Advisory Council to follow up on social dialog. This new organ, which falls under the direct authority of the King, aims to establish closer links between government authorities and social groups. It will advise on questions put forth either by the King or by the majority of its members. The Council is chaired by a high-level magistrate; members comprise 16 ministers including the Chief of the Government, representatives of the Council Chambers, employers' organizations, workers' and teachers' unions, as well as eminent persons chosen for their competence and integrity.

● **In Geneva** an Economic and Social Council was created in order to coordinate a multitude of fragmented tripartite consultations. Trade unions were occupying over 200 seats in different specialized organs. It will comprise 20 trade union representatives, the same number of employers and an equal number of representatives from the State Council, the latter of whom are not members of the administration but are elected. First item on the agenda: the fight against social exclusion.

INITIATIVES

● **The first *Rugmark* carpet** – that is, certified as manufactured without child labor – was presented to the Vice-President of the German Parliament during a ceremony organized in Bonn. This label is attributed by a foundation composed of carpet manufacturers, non-governmental organizations and an import promotion agency supported by the German and Indian governments. It grants the label to manufacturers after verifying that they are not employing children. Moreover, a private Swiss foundation has announced the launching of a label which will guarantee to buyers of textiles imported from developing countries that the product was manufactured under conditions respecting the minimal social standards.

● **Industrial relations** are arousing more and more interest in Europe, as demonstrated by the launching in January 1995 of the quarterly magazine *Transfer* by the European Trade Union Institute. This publication aims to stimulate cooperation between trade unionism and academics to enhance the knowledge and understanding of industrial relations in the field.

ANXIETIES

● **Illegal workers** are increasingly spread throughout the construction sector which represents about 12% of the GNP of 15 member States of the European Union. A trade union source claims that in Germany alone, an estimated half-million workers are employed illegally in the building industry. Competition in this sector is especially fierce and encourages people to accept low wages, illegal work and precarious conditions, with all the consequences this has on social protection. This situation was condemned during the first European conference on the labor market in the construction industry last March in Bonn, which brought together social partners and academics.

Jacques Maillard

● **Flags of convenience**. Will they be making an appearance in civil aviation? To streamline costs and reduce their personnel, airlines are leaning towards relocating some of their services (Swissair, British Airways), subcontracting foreign crews (Alitalia uses Australians) or flying the flag of a foreign partner on part of their fleet (Sabena's attempt to base a part of its fleet in Luxembourg). ❑

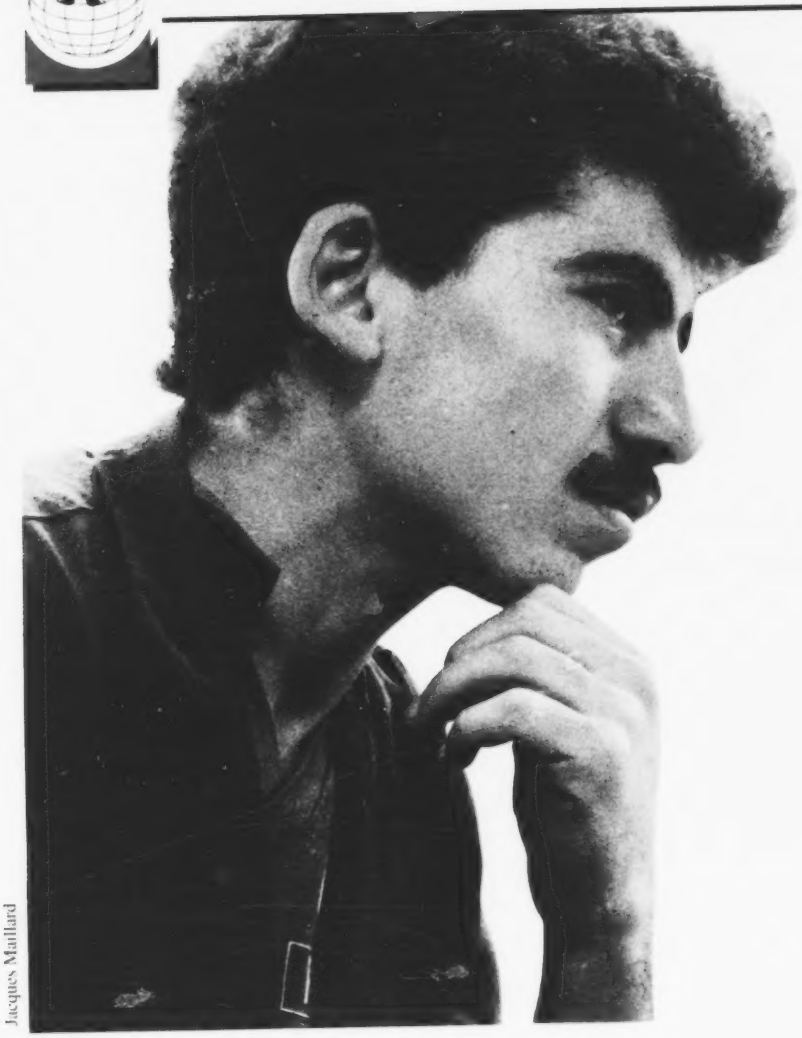
Inflation curbed

● Inflation has been fairly well contained around the world in 1994, in general, according to figures available in the ILO Bureau of Statistics for 112 countries. Only Brazil still shows a four-digit rate: 1,120.4%, which is nevertheless a drop of more than half compared to the 1993 figure (2,491%).

Out of five countries which show three-digit rates, three are in Eastern Europe: the Russian Federation (215.1%), Bulgaria (121.9%) and the Republic of Moldova (104.7% against last year's 2,707%). The other two are Angola (971.9%) and Turkey (125.5%).

In all, inflation slowed down in 68 countries out of all those for which data exists, especially in all the former socialist republics, with the exception of Bulgaria, Estonia and Hungary. Inflation remains a threat to the African continent where half of the 22 countries covered by the ILO study registered double-digit rates. It is worth noting, however, the performance of Kenya which succeeded in reducing its rate from 52.1% in 1993 to 6.6% in 1994.

This page was prepared with the collaboration of the *International Labor Review* of the ILO



Jacques Maillard

Despite evident progress, job discrimination because of race and ethnic descent is pervasive in the world of work, even if it is played down or flatly denied. Unemployment among immigrants and their children is four times higher than among nationals in the rich host countries. Millions of people are thus excluded from the mainstream of life, constituting an ever-growing underclass. This societal time-bomb needs to be defused without delay.

Europe

Why hire one and not the other?

"Sorry, you are too late. The vacancy ad was in the newspaper the day before yesterday, and the job has already been taken," said the shopowner. "Perhaps some other time, Mustafa, brother."

Ten minutes later another call, a different answer.

"Can you tell me something about yourself, Mr. Liemt... That sounds good. Could you come for an interview right away?"

The shop was on a main street and its owner, short of an assistant, waited in vain for Jan Peter Liemt. His name was faked, as was that of the first caller, Mustafa El Mansury. In reality they were college students, one of Moroccan descent, the other native Dutch, who volunteered to pose as "testers" in an ILO-sponsored survey of discrimination in recruitment for low-skilled jobs.

A three-to-one chance

The survey involved several hundreds of vacancies. Its results show that when a young Dutch national and an equally qualified young Moroccan apply for a semi-skilled job, the native has 3-to-1 chance to be invited for an interview. Some employers, who did not reject the Moroccan outright, found some excuse to eliminate his candidature at a later stage.

Surinamese testers participated in a parallel probe carried out in the job market requiring college education. Both Moroccan and Surinamese testers were born in the Netherlands and had Dutch nationality. They had many Dutch friends

and seemed fully integrated into Dutch society. Moroccans and Surinamese are two of the largest ethnic groups in the Netherlands where foreigners constitute about 8 per cent of the population.

While for a Moroccan applicant the possibility of getting a semi-skilled job is very small, the college-educated Surinamese group fared a little better. When applying for the same job with their Dutch peers, four in every five were invited for an interview. A rejection came more often from private firms than from the public sector enterprises with positive action programs for ethnic groups. Although these programs do not result in preferential recruitment of the foreigners, they seem to reduce bias in hiring procedures.

The results of the survey have been a cold shower for a country which has invested much money, manpower and effort in public policy to integrate newcomers. Courses have been set up where they can learn Dutch. Special vocational training programs have been established for the not-so-young. Financial incentives are being offered to employers who hire immigrants. The government has changed the national legislation to bring it in line with ILO conventions on migrant labor. And yet, look what is happening!

A difficult struggle

The Dutch survey is part of an ongoing ILO project to help member countries find better and more effective ways of tackling labor market discrimination against foreign and ethnic minority workers. "Many of our constituents think they have no such problem," says project leader Roger Zegers de Beijl, "because they have signed ILO conventions and passed their own laws to ensure that the migrants be treated equally.

Unfortunately, it is not that simple. The problem continues to persist. It does not mean that you could do without legislation and international standards. You need them to back up whatever you do, but you never should be tempted to think that they alone can solve the problem."

Nor can it be chased away by public incantations – "we are not an immigration country". There is no way of hermetically sealing borders to keep the foreigners out either, for they are highly-motivated people. With all the trade liberalization coming about globally and regionally, more and more workers will be on the move. Migration for employment will be the growth industry of the next century.

Seventy million persons mostly from the Third World are living in other countries and over one million emigrate permanently to a "promised land" each year. In Western Europe the current stock of foreign-origin workforce is around 13 million, not counting illegal residents, refugees and asylum-seekers. These aging, prosperous economies will have to decide whether to meet demand for appropriately-skilled labor by implementing policies directed toward internal restructuring, or to admit more migrants. Most European Union governments will probably opt for both.

> Discrimination is not only pervasive, but elusive as well in the sense that it is extremely difficult to pin down responsibility for it.

The traditional receivers – Australia, Canada and the United States – have already set immigration targets for the next five years. Large family reunion components will be filled by ethnics from those developing countries which provided the majority of immigrants in the recent past. However, the salient feature of each of the traditional receivers' future programs is to increase the number of highly-skilled immigrants. Given the expected strengthening of the economic blocs in Europe, Asia/Pacific and the Americas, some experts predict that we are about to see fierce competition on a worldwide scale to secure the most highly-skilled workers.

Immigration waves from the Third World have made Western societies ethnically and culturally more diverse than they were in the past, and will continue doing so in the future. The successful management of this diversity presents a new challenge to the nation-state.

Inequality of opportunity

ILO findings show that discrimination in the employment of migrant workers is widespread and systematic in Western Europe, yet it is played down or flatly denied. Faced with concrete evidence, personnel from employment agencies and labor exchange officials blame the employers, staff selectors put the blame on their supe-

Jacques Maillard

Competition is becoming fiercer each day in the labor market: candidates should not be judged by their ethnic origin but by an objective evaluation of their qualifications.

riors, who put the blame on the firm's clients. Discrimination is not only pervasive, but elusive as well in the sense that it is extremely difficult to pin down responsibility for it. Research also shows that "race" remains a determining factor in the allocation of workers in the U.S. labor market, while other studies have demonstrated discrimination against West Indians in Canada and Vietnamese in Australia.

In Europe, where immigrants from the developing world were often allowed in as "guest workers", their presence was originally seen as a temporary solution to a labor market shortage.

As a result, government efforts to integrate the newcomers were inadequate. The first generation of migrants in the early 1960s were packed into quasi-ghettos in suburban areas. Now their descendants have grown up inculcated with the values of equality and discovering that inequality is their "birthright".

These youngsters face enormous problems of transition from school to work because there are few jobs waiting for them and because they are not as well-equipped as their local peers to pick up apprenticeships and training opportunities or to convince employers that they are as qualified or dependable as national youths. Therefore, they have to make do with what is available – the least well-paid jobs and the least stable jobs, working in traditional sectors of immigrant employment rather than in promising future-oriented branches and occupations. At best they land jobs that perpetuate their bottom-rung position in the labor market. Of course, individuals can and do break out of this vicious circle, but most get ensnared in it, constituting an economic and social under-class.

Wasted resources

"What distinguishes the children and grandchildren of Europe's former labor immigrants from their parents," says Roger Bohning, Chief of the ILO's International Migration for Employment Branch, "is that they no longer acquiesce. They know better and they want to do better. If societies do not open up their opportunities to them, these youngsters will increasingly revolt. First as individuals, then as street gangs and finally as ethnic groups."

Inequality and discrimination are immoral and politically dangerous. They also lead to an inefficient use of human resources which in turn can result in lower productivity and higher production costs. Research results confirm that employers who take steps to eliminate discrimination in their enterprises are rewarded with improved performance, efficiency and better relations in the workplace.

In the ILO's view, promoting equality of opportunity and treatment at work is the key to the success of all integration policies. Under its new project which is now being implemented in the Netherlands, the ILO wants not only to demonstrate the breadth and depth of job discrimination, but also to take stock of what is being done about it in different countries. "Then we will go a step further", says Roger Zegers de Beijl. "We will take, for instance, the text of the law and see how it works out in practice. Is there a special redress mechanism people can turn to? Or take the crucial question of the burden of proof that injustice has been committed. Should not the onus be on the firm, especially when it has a reputation of a white-only employer? That is something which is never touched, probably because it is politically sensitive."

Defusing the bomb

The project will also evaluate training and education courses for personnel managers, trade union officials and labor exchange staff in anti-discrimination behavior and equal treatment. Again, the litmus test will be results, not goals. It is an action-oriented project, for its findings will be immediately channelled through international seminars and publications to member countries.

To skeptics full equality of opportunity and treatment at work may sound like Never-Never-Land in a world where 3 billion people compete in one global labor market. But Roger Zegers de Beijl disagrees. "Even if there are too few jobs for too many people, he argues, at least you should not have certain groups excluded from mainstream society because of their ethnicity or color or religion. It is bad enough if ten percent of the labor force is long-term unemployed. But if on top of it the majority of long-term jobless are of foreign origin who will never make it into normal working life, you are sitting on a societal time bomb which you should try to defuse. Inaction could be very dangerous, if not fatal." ❑

Eastern Europe

in the

The transition of East and Central Europe to a market economy is proving far more difficult than foreseen and the social costs – including widespread poverty and mass unemployment – much higher than anticipated. Parts of the region risk a "social explosion", according to a recent ILO report*. "Social and labor market conditions continue to deteriorate".

"Social and labor market conditions continue to deteriorate in the new democracies of Eastern Europe". The ILO made the statement in its report on world employment published last spring. As such, in some countries, this may imply adopting a more gradual approach to change and requires, as a matter of high priority, a halt to the continuous decline in investment, living standards, employment and social protection.

With productivity and output falling or stagnating at reduced levels, analysts agree that the transition to a market economy needs to be completed as rapidly as possible. However, it is essential, according to the ILO report, that social costs be kept within tolerable limits – lest tensions and political upheaval threaten the sustainability of the entire process.

Unemployment and poverty

All the countries concerned experienced sharp falls in output during the years 1990-1993. Relative improvements have been recorded since 1992 in Central Europe

Trouble transition

(notably in the Czech Republic and Hungary) while the recession has deepened in Bulgaria, Romania and the countries of the former USSR.

The consequent fall in employment has been considerable ranging from 11.5 per cent in the Czech Republic to 22 per cent in Poland and 28 per cent in Hungary between 1989 and 1994. But even with these sharp drops, the decline in employment has been much lower than the fall in output, which suggests that unsustainable labor hoarding is taking place and the real level of unemployment could soon skyrocket.

This stark prospect is rarely reflected in official unemployment figures and it augurs poorly, both for living standards and for the productivity increases necessary for improved export performance and economic recovery.

"The worst aspect of economic restructuring is the appalling growth in the number of people living in poverty". In Bulgaria, "by mid-1992 nearly 73 per cent of all households had incomes below the official social minimum". In Poland at the same date, "official estimates indicated that over 50 per cent had incomes below the poverty line". Various disparities within countries have emerged as a result of growing unemployment. "Unemployment of ethnic minorities has risen more sharply than the average," the report points out, and "women are being particularly adversely affected".

The report says that in the countries of the former USSR "about 100 million people were living below the official poverty line" by the end of 1991. In 1992, commentators in Moscow estimated that the average household was spending over 75 per cent of its income on food alone – and macroeconomic conditions have generally worsened since then.

Creating employment services

Regardless of the relative pace of reform, governments in Central and Eastern Europe will have to address the consequences of mass unemployment through active labor market policies. Unemployment benefits, where they exist, are often so low as to discourage many of the unemployed from even registering. Evidence of long-term unemployment is building with increasing numbers of workers who "have simply left the labor force, quite often joining the black economy". This appears especially true in the case of Russia.

Basic employment services, which hardly existed in the past, must be developed as a matter of high priority throughout the region. "Currently, in Western Europe there is probably an average of one employment service official for every 1,000 workers", the report points out. "In Central and Eastern Europe, it is a little over one per 10,000."

A dramatic reinforcement of employment services would "allow for more effective redeployment and retraining measures that are of critical importance given the magnitude of the economic restructuring underway".

Many large industrial enterprises in the region however, "have cut back on training as a relatively easy way of responding to the growing financial pressures they were facing", and training has been in sharp decline. "In such circumstances," argues the report, "it is vital that governments intervene more directly", through the establishment of a new institutional framework to support enterprise-based training, replacing the previous system where the entire responsibility rested with the enterprises themselves.

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Investment and reform

"The crisis of mass unemployment will ultimately be solved only by the expansion of output", states the report. But, "initial optimism about the inflow of foreign direct investment has turned out to have been misplaced". Total inflow since 1990 has amounted to less than US$10 billion for nine countries, "with most (80 per cent) of it going to Hungary and the Czech Republic. Negligible amounts, if any, have gone to transition economies in the former Soviet Union."

"It is imperative", says the ILO report, "to improve on these investment trends if the problem of mass unemployment is to be overcome."

Achieving this will require the completion of reforms to create a reliable system of property rights and well-functioning capital markets. It will, in addition, call for improvements in physical infrastructure and a major effort to train workers to the skill requirements of new industries.

The better alternative, says the ILO, is to adopt a gradual approach inasmuch as "there exist policy instruments which make it feasible to temporarily slow down the process of restructuring while still ensuring that change occurs in the right direction".

But even here there are risks. "The gradual approach", warns the report, "should not rely on a continuation of indiscriminate and unconditional protection through soft credits to state-owned enterprises or the imposition of import quotas. (...) Instead, temporary assistance should be provided through transparent fiscal measures and be targeted to enterprises that show promise of future viability. The assistance should also be time-bound, be conditional upon progress in restructuring, and be structured around a phased reduction of support."

Finally, the ILO report underlines the importance of tripartite consultations in facilitating the transition process, "by mobilizing support for the political and economic changes underway and by promoting acceptance of the social costs involved". ⌟

* World Employment 1995. An ILO report. *ISBN 92-2-109448-0.*

Africa

The organized sector mobilizes against AIDS

Despite national and international efforts to control the disease, AIDS continues to claim lives especially in many sub-Saharan African countries, decimating their professional workforce. It poses a major challenge to the world community and to all the actors of the labor force worldwide who join hands to fight the spread of the epidemic.

"Our youth are dying in their prime time, leaving the elderly overburdened with the task of caring for orphans, a job they are ill prepared for. The epidemic has caused a serious hemorrhage of our professionals and of the most educated in our society", states H.E. Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, President of the Republic of Uganda in his speech at the opening of an ILO Tripartite workshop on the role of the organized sector in reproductive health and the prevention of AIDS in English-speaking Africa.

This is true of several African countries which have lost lawyers, doctors, teachers, managers and other skilled people, a resource that is difficult to renew. Despite national and international efforts to control the disease, the HIV virus continues to spread in many sub-Saharan African countries.

Estimates from the World Health Organization indicate that more than 13-15 million people worldwide were infected with HIV as of late 1994, with more than 8 million in sub-Saharan Africa alone. In Uganda, it is now estimated that 1.5 million are living with HIV and this is projected to increase to 1.9 million by 1998. AIDS cases reported in Zambia totalled 30,000 as of October 1994, and 33,000 in Zimbabwe, although the actual numbers are probably much higher due to under-reporting. In both countries, a high proportion of reported cases are between the 20 and 39 years of age – 70 per cent in Zambia and 74 per cent in Zimbabwe.

Executives exposed

HIV/AIDS affects primarily people in the most sexually-active age group; that is, those between 20 and 40 years of age, and those who are in their most productive years and who have benefitted from years of investment in their training. Studies carried out in Rwanda, Swaziland, Zaire and Zimbabwe show that AIDS affects more persons in the higher socio-economic bracket, those who represent the skilled workers, supervisors and managers of all important sectors of the economies of African countries. These skilled persons will fall sick and die faster than replacements can be trained to take over. Consequently, the skilled labor force and managerial staff are replaced by younger and less-experienced persons which can lead to what a Zambian mining report indicates, "Not necessarily a sudden collapse in output. Rather, there will be a steady but noticeable increase in breakdowns, accidents, delays and misjudgments, and output will suffer."

This affects sectors as diverse as the mining industry, banking, petroleum, insurance and transport sectors, large commercial farms and agro-industries. Markets are also affected as consumer power declines. According to the Employers' Confederation of Zimbabwe, "skills shortages and inevitably higher wages will have a marked effect on the cost structure of industries. In some cases, there are likely to be added incentives towards mechanization and automation".

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HIV-related diseases and AIDS bring with them a high rate of absenteeism as workers become more and more afflicted, their overall health conditions worsen and they stay away from work to seek treatment. Even healthy workers, especially women, will take time off to tend to sick family members. Some companies have documented the high number of days taken off for sickness or funerals. As one interviewee in Uganda noted, "Death has become so common that if one misses work for one day to attend a funeral, one can easily end up losing a month's work!" Over the six-year period from 1988-89 to 1993-94, the Uganda Commercial Bank reported 229 AIDS deaths among its staff of about 1,600 employees (about 14 per cent).

AIDS morbidity will raise the demand for scarce health-care resources and equipment. In 1992, hospital bed occupancy because of HIV-related diseases in major hospitals of large African cities was from 40-60% in Kinshasa, Zaire, 50% in Lusaka, Zambia, 60% in Kigali, Rwanda, and 70% in Bujumbura, Burundi. The direct and indirect costs of AIDS on national economies is great. Also, in the mid-80s, a study found that 6.4% of the 2,384 hospital workers in Mama Yemo Hospital in Kinshasa, Zaire, were infected. The attrition rates for their highly-skilled and highly-technical personnel far exceed the training capacity of the countries concerned.

A synergy of efforts

"At the enterprise level, employers, union leaders, workers and families must be involved in sharing knowledge about

a safe sex life, effective, affordable and acceptable methods of family planning, safe pregnancy and childbirth and on living a healthy life," emphasized the President of Uganda.

In developing countries, especially in Africa, where skilled and managerial labor is scarce, the organized sector is still rather small but has a major interest in fighting the spread of the epidemic, the participants of the workshop noted. As such, workers' and employers' organizations from a number of countries reported on their programs to support prevention and non-discrimination in the workplace as a complement to national efforts.

The Zimbabwe Confederation of Trade Unions (ZCTU) has been implementing an educational program concerning HIV/AIDS since 1992, as part of the activities of its Health and Social Welfare Department. The Zambia Congress of Trade Unions has embarked on a vigorous educational campaign in support of Government efforts to sensitize the labor force and society in general to the effects of HIV/AIDS infection.

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In 1988, the Federation of Uganda Employers received funds for an AIDS prevention program. It is estimated that some 150,000 workers have been reached by the program, and over the period 1988 to 1993 more than 550 trainers and nearly 7,000 peer educators received training. Over 200 top executives attended sensitization seminars and the full-time training team of 6 persons also provides ongoing supervision of new educators.

In responding to AIDS prevention, enterprises need to formulate an overall policy which protects human rights and counters any discrimination due to the disease, increases the level of awareness amongst its personnel so that they can correctly evaluate personal risk, and motivates them to adopt safer sexual practices, says the ILO workshop report.

Together with all the social partners, the first thing to do is to empower people with the true facts about HIV/AIDS and not stigmatize those who are infected. Otherwise, infected persons will fear to reveal that they are infected and may inadvertently spread it further.

TRIPARTITE ACTION

Recognizing that the combat against AIDS must be fought on a multilateral, global front, constituents of the ILO at its Africa Regional Conference held in Mauritius in January 1994, requested that ILO assistance include activities to help government and employers' and workers' organizations to respond to the threat posed by the high incidence of HIV/AIDS infection.

The Tripartite workshop at Kampala was the first such regional workshop ever organized by the ILO. It was hosted by the Federation of Uganda Employers (FUE) with financial support from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and technical support from the Global Program on AIDS of the World Health Organization. It provided the opportunity to exchange experiences, clear up misconceptions and learn about Uganda's experience in the face of the pandemic. There was a sense or urgency among participants about the need to take action and disseminate information more effectively. Participants expressed concern about developing effective programs for behavioral change and for coping with the problems which enterprises, workers, their families and communities are encountering.

This turned out to be a timely opportunity for ILO's tripartite constituents from these countries to exchange experiences and hopefully return to strengthen their organization's efforts.

Concrete action

The ILO Workshop report presents several interesting instances of enterprise programs. Some companies are running training programs for AIDS counsellors and are providing medical facilities for employees and their families.

Ubombo Ranches Ltd., one of the largest companies in Swaziland, employs up to 4,000 persons in the area of sugar cane and mills. It has a well-developed personnel services infrastructure, including a 45-bed hospital and a team of 21 village health workers to provide primary health care on site. In January 1991, the Ranch saw the start of its "Train the Trainers" program in which all the village health workers and the village headmen were given intensive training on HIV/AIDS and family planning and a baseline survey of knowledge about this scourge was conducted in the villages. This was followed by an intensive training program for all the farm managers on the sugar estate. Condoms were made freely available in every village and at the workplace. Refresher courses for the HIV/AIDS awareness teams are held at regular intervals and will be maintained until the problem is solved.

BAT Uganda 1984 Ltd., is a joint venture, company between the Government and BATCo which is a British based company, a member of the BAT Industries Group, the third largest industrial enterprise in Britain. At present, the company employs a total of 596 permanent employees and about 1,000 people on either contract or a casual basis. The AIDS Training Program was first introduced in 1989, by the Federation of Uganda Employers who fully financed two sensitization programs. This was followed by a "Training for Trainers" program. Regular refresher programs are being maintained and in 1994, about 90 per cent of the permanent employees and over 300 temporary workers had been exposed to these programs.

As a result of such programs, BAT reported that its medical budget, taking into account the inflationary factors and general increase in the cost of medicine, is starting to decline after earlier increases, as the progression in expenditure indicates: 50 million shillings in 1991 (six cases were reported); 76 in 1992 (10 cases); 62 in 1993 (21 cases); 50 in 1994 (only 1 case). Since the incubation period for HIV has been estimated at about five years, the 1991-93 figures could be explained by the fact that some people were already infected.

The ILO is well-placed to encourage policy formulation and programs on HIV/AIDS prevention, bringing together the views and concerns of governments as well as their social partners, particularly employers' organizations and trade unions. The increasing awareness of the problem can indeed prompt the ILO to act as a catalyst in this major fight for the economic and human future of the whole of Africa. As noted by Dr. Faustin Yao of the WHO Global Program on AIDS, "the business community itself should understand that its own long-term interest lies in its greater involvement in the effort so it can tailor its own level of response to the disease accordingly". ❑

Kiran Mehra-Kerpelman

Renewing social peace through tripartite dialog

Political upheavals, technological transformation, globalization of the economy... Maneuvring a country, either rich or poor, through the turbulences of the end of this century, is becoming a high-risk exercise. One of the surest methods of preventing a serious mishap – a social explosion, with consequences which the entire population will have to bear – is the restoration of mechanisms which would enable employers' and workers' organizations to participate in the decision-making and implementation process.

"It is the ILO's conviction that tripartite cooperation in economic and social policy-making has a renewed role to play in forging democratic, economically-productive societies that incorporate social justice."

This is the resolute opening of a new collection of ILO studies* concerning tripartism in eight countries and two areas around the world. It traces the experiences with participation of employers' and workers' representatives in governmental policy formation from the early 1970s to the beginning of the 1990s. These studies show that the usefulness of tripartite cooperation in a period of crisis has been reaffirmed time and time again.

"In societies having undergone wrenching change, such as years of dictatorship followed by the restoration of democracy", tripartite arrangements have been an important tool in maintaining social peace during the transition period. At some point in any social change – structural adjustment, privatization, decentralization – policy coordination is necessary and priorities have to be set. The cooperation of strong organizations of employers and workers can buy social peace – a peace taken for granted until it is broken.

Development of the concept

Tripartite cooperation is an ideological thread that has run through the In-

THE CONCERTED ECONOMIC SYSTEM OF BELGIUM

A small country with a strong industrial tradition, Belgium was confronted with the cumulative effects of a decline in several of its most important sectors of activity at the beginning of the 1980s: coal mining, steel and textiles. Unemployment jumped from 5% in 1977 to 13% in 1983. Largely due to its highly-developed system of consultation and of participation of employers' and trade union organizations in decision-making, the country succeeded in avoiding a major social crisis.

A subtle balance of mutual information exchange, formal and informal negotiation, intimidation, flexibility and rigidity, this system has enabled social partners, according to circumstances, to make themselves heard, and the government to make itself better understood even when it was judged necessary to take authoritarian measures (as was the case from 1982 to 1986 in the matter of moderating salaries).

The cornerstones of the formal system are the Central Economic Council and the National Labor Council, within which employers and trade unions jointly analyze problems, issue advice and negotiate, in particular interprofessional agreements. Each sector of activity is headed by a joint commission in which collective agreements are negotiated. But in reality, the informal relations between the Government and the social interlocutors are permanent and the borderline between the spheres of responsibility of each is not only permeable but also fluctuates over time.

Therefore, confronted today with the three major problems of the social security budget deficit, unemployment and competitiveness of enterprises, with the passing months the three social partners endeavor to find acceptable compromises. In December 1992, a 1993-94 interprofessional central agreement was signed in spite of the initial opposition of the employers who protested against the reduction in the margin for bargaining. In March 1993, the application of the Act to safeguard competitiveness gave rise to a long and difficult consultation; the measures finally taken to assist the sectors confronted by international competition avoided at the same time taxing enterprises and calling into question the principle of pay indexation. In April 1993, the trade unions again succeeded in preserving the principle of pay indexation during the discussion on the measures to be taken to reduce the budget deficit.

The new developments since the ILO study was issued cannot be enumerated here due to lack of space. They confirm the will of the social partners not to break off the dialog, in view of the growing difficulty of the problems to resolve.

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In a representative democracy, each actor – government, employers' and workers' organizations – accepts to renounce certain advantages in the short-term in the perspective of the better deal that social peace brings to the whole of society.

ternational Labor Organization from its founding in 1919, to date. The tripartite structure of the ILO is unique in the United Nations system. The ILO promotes social dialog within member States involving trade unions and employers in the formulation of national policy on social and economic issues affecting labor.

A number of assumptions underlie contemporary systems of national participation by representatives of workers and employers in government policy-making. A fundamental one is the acceptance of pluralism in society in which autonomous groups operate within a sovereign state. Groups with divergent interests recognize each other's coexistence while promoting their own distinct views.

Another basic idea behind tripartite cooperation is representative democracy, which is complementary to parliamentary democracy. Employers' and workers' interests, though promoted by political parties, are diluted in national parliaments, which are forums where the needs of all constituents are taken into account.

In the end, tripartite cooperation is based on each party's perception of the long-term advantage of participation, even if it means giving up some autonomy or foregoing short-term benefits. In exchange for basic social peace and action by trade unions and employers, governments cede a bit of their monopoly on policy-making or the provision of certain state services such as employment services or social security.

In democracies a close link between a political party and one or both of the social partners can facilitate consensus, as in Australia, or undermine it, as in the United Kingdom, note these studies. In dictatorships, the domination of one or both of the social partners by the ruling political parties may lead to a so-called tripartite accord, but not to true social dialog. Experiences in francophone Africa, for instance, where the trade unions were long subordinated to the ruling, and usually exclusive, political party, show how a lack of autonomy can nip genuine tripartite participation in the bud.

The trade unions

As a condition for social dialog, organizations representing workers (and employers) must be sufficiently representative of their members to have effective control over their own affiliates. It was precisely the peak trade union body's perceived "failure to deliver" which contributed to a loss of confidence in tripartite cooperation in the United Kingdom. Recent events in Italy may point in a similar direction. In Austria, by contrast, the trade union movement is so highly centralized that no union is permitted to propose concluding a collective agreement without the consent of both the trade union federation and the tripartite Joint Commission.

The decline in trade union membership in many industrialized market economy countries has also eroded the trade unions' status as representatives of their labor constituencies. But the extent of support which trade unions have cannot be measured solely by the share of workers they manage to attract as members. In the Netherlands, for example, the authority of the unions is greatly enhanced by the extension of collective agreements to unorganized workers and employers. In that country, as long as trade unions have around 30 per cent of the workforce organized, unorganized workers are willing to go on strike as well – the ultimate show of strength for the labor movement. And of course under Socialist governments in France and Spain, trade union power has far exceeded trade union membership.

The employers

Membership of employers' confederations may be stacked toward larger companies and industry (as for example the *Union des industries de la Communauté Européenne/UNICE* at the European Community level, which recently called for the establishment of a European Employers' Network). There have been some instances in Australia of competing claims between employers' organizations on the one hand and business and financial leaders on the other. Small employers in Italy have objected to not being properly represented on the national economic and social council.

As with trade unions, the organizational structure of employers' groups is an important determinant of how and to what extent tripartite cooperation will occur. Central organizations fa-

cilitate cooperation in a practical sense, but an umbrella grouping is not always empowered to make commitments on behalf of its members. The contours which tripartite cooperation takes on necessarily reflect the structure of the employers' and workers' organizations participating in it.

The hazards ahead

The erosion of the power of the nation state in favor of multinational enterprises and international lending agencies is probably the most serious challenge to tripartite cooperation today. With the exception of some transnational sectoral arrangements and the slowly emerging "social Europe", tripartite cooperation above the national level has not yet gone much beyond general policy discussions. Internally, national institutions have been complemented by the important development of bipartite and tripartite arrangements within their territory at the sectoral and regional levels; the movement towards greater policy coordination which is occurring between countries will bear careful observation.

The period examined in depth by these country studies exemplifies how different economic problems (high inflation, growing unemployment) have produced fresh solutions, each reflecting the labor relations framework in the particular society.

The studies also show that the vagaries of politics can take their toll on tripartite cooperation as easily as they can reinforce it. In any assessment of the impact of tripartite cooperation over time in any one country, "it would be advisable to take the long view", the introduction to the studies points out. "It is over the long haul in many countries that tripartite arrangements have demonstrated their resilience and usefulness..."

"While it would be naive to think that tripartite cooperation is a panacea for all ills, it is a reflex that can be nurtured, to be then called upon when the need arises. There is no harm, and ultimately considerable good, in keeping the lines of communication open." Tripartite cooperation is, after all, "a sensible way for intelligent women and men to manage their common affairs". ❑

* Towards social dialog: Tripartite cooperation in national economic and social policy-making. *Anne Trebilcock et al. ISBN 92-2-108744-1. ILO, 1994.*

Governing Body

Debate on and internati

At the end of deliberations on the social dimensions of international trade, the ILO Governing Body at its 262nd session (March-April 1995) called on the Organization to intensify efforts to promote respect for fundamental worker rights, to study renewed measures to eliminate child labor and to strengthen its supervisory machinery in the effort to promote labor standards worldwide.

It also decided to take measures to build upon the conclusions reached by the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen and it approved a US $500 million budget for activities in 1996-97 (zero real growth compared to 1994-95).

To facilitate comparison at the major program level, the budget rate of exchange has been calculated at 1.45 Swiss francs to the US dollar, the same as in the 1994-95 budget. Recognizing that the cost of the proposals in both US dollar and Swiss franc terms will continue to evolve with the exchange rate, the final rate of exchange will be set at the market rate at the time the budget is reviewed by the International Labor Conference next June.

Among the priority objectives of the ILO for the coming biennium are the promotion of democracy and human rights; the alleviation of unemployment and poverty, and the protection of working people.

Trade and social justice

Summing up a debate which got underway at the November 1994 session of the Governing Body, the Chairperson of the Working Party on the Social Dimensions of the Liberalization of International Trade, Ms. Matilda Hartwell, acknowledged that major areas of disagreement remained.

However, she noted that, broad consensus prevailed on a number of issues and that there was a majority view that the Working Party should continue with the goal of providing a forum for an informal open-ended debate capable of taking a broad overview of politically-contentious issues which cannot easily be debated in the technical committees of the ILO. Once broad political consensus emerges, the Working Party could then assign specific technical work to be carried out in appropriate committees.

The Working Party agreed to convene again in November 1995, on the understanding that it would not pursue the question of trade sanctions and that any further discussion of the link between international trade and social standards through a sanctions-based social clause mechanism should be suspended.

The Working Group will focus its energies on three broad areas: shared values that will give political direction to the effort to promote social justice and economic progress; an examination of the ILO's role in helping member States achieve social development through economic growth; and a broad discussion of different ways in which to improve the effectiveness of and strengthen the ILO standards supervisory system.

The Working Party requested the ILO's Employment Committee to study the problem of child labor and present its findings at the next sitting of the Governing Body in November 1995. It also decided that questions of fundamental worker rights would be dealt with by the Committee on Legal Issues and International Labor Standards.

Concerning the follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development held in Copenhagen last March, the Governing Body welcomed in particular, "the recognition given by the Summit to the special role to be played by the ILO, because of its mandate, its tripartite structure and its expertise, in contributing to the

standards
onal trade

implementation of the Summit's Program of Action in the fields of employment and social development". It furthermore requested the Director-General "to ensure that the ILO's research, operation and standard-setting activities are closely geared to contributing to the implementation of the Declaration and Program of Action in the fields of competence of the ILO".

Freedom of association

In the domain of freedom of association, the Governing Body examined a total of 27 cases of alleged abuses and came to definite conclusions in 19 of them. It noted with satisfaction the release from detention of trade unionists in China and Korea, the rehiring of fired unionists in Hungary and Panama, the establishment of a system of deduction for trade union dues at point of pay in Russia, the adoption of legislation on the status of civil servants in Chile and the preparation in Sweden of a legal project to reestablish collective bargaining agreements that had been rendered void by previous legislation.

The Governing Body regretted "that despite direct contact missions which took place in El Salvador in 1993, serious violations of trade union rights have subsequently occurred and with respect to which the Government has not sent any comments". It deplored the lack of the Government response to the allegations "despite repeated invitations to it to send its observations". Among the cases mentioned, the Governing Body condemned the alleged assassination on 27 March 1994, of Meriberto Galicia Sánchez an official of El Salvador's National Sugar Industry Trade Union (SINA) and Pedro Constanza, a member of the union. The Committee condemned these crimes and called upon the Government to "clarify the facts, determine responsibilities and punish the guilty parties".

The complaints against Indonesia, presented by the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions and the World Confederation of Labor, concern specific violations of trade union rights, "including the denial of the workers' right to establish organizations of their own choosing, the persistent interference by government authorities, the military and employers in trade union activities, and the ongoing restrictions in collective bargaining and strike action".

In addition, the complaints allege threats, detention and numerous acts of violence against trade union leaders and members. The Governing Body expressed "its deepest concern over the extreme seriousness of the allegations". With respect to violations of the right to organize, the Governing Body noted that "the Indonesian trade union registration system at the national level comprises requirements that are so stringent as to constitute a major limitation to collective bargaining since very few trade unions can see their establishment legally recognized".

Three cases involving complaints against the Government of Peru involve "allegations of killings, disappearances, detentions, physical ill-treatment and torture of various leaders and trade unionists, repression of demonstrations, ransacking of union premises and violations of trade union rights". The complaints were brought by The General Confederation of Peruvian Workers and trade unions representing miners, metalworkers and steelworkers, and teachers. Among the complaints cited is one by the National Federation of Miners, Metalworkers and Steelworkers of Peru, which denounced a pattern of killing trade unionists in the mining sector, 23 of whom have been murdered since 1988.

The Governing Body expressed "its most profound consternation that, in spite of the extreme gravity of the allegations which date back to 1988 to the repression of demonstrations and the ransacking of trade union premises, the Government has not sent any detailed and precise information on the majority of these matters or has done so in an incomplete and imprecise manner."

The Governing Body urged that the Government of Peru "send, without delay, precise and concrete information on all the questions asked by it." ❑

HOMAGE TO ROBERTO AGO

During its March-April session, the ILO Governing Body paid homage to a former Chairman, Mr. Roberto Ago (Italy), who passed away in February 1995. Born in 1907, he obtained a doctorate in both law and political science. He pursued a brilliant career as an international lawyer. Professor Ago was President of the International Court of Justice at the Hague; from 1961 to 1994 he served as Chairman of the ILO Governing Body's Committee on Freedom of Association.

"His lively intelligence, his keen sense for diplomacy, his exemplary courtesy and his constant concern for social justice have made a contribution to the Committee's work without compare. The work accomplished by the Committee over these years and, more specifically, the positive influence which it has been able to have on the respect for human rights in general and trade union rights in particular are to a large degree due to the imagination and unlimited energies devoted by Chairman Ago", noted his former colleagues.

Since 1994, Mr. Jean-Jacques Oechslin (France), President of the International Organization of Employers, had served, in the interim period, as the Chairman of the Committee on Freedom of Association. The Governing Body has recently named a new independent Chairman, Mr. Max Rood, Professor of Labor Law at the University of Leiden (Netherlands).

UPCOMING MEETINGS

- **6-23 June: 82nd Session of the International Labor Conference (Geneva).**
- **24 June: 263rd Session of the Governing Body (Geneva).**
- **3-5 July: Fifteenth Ordinary Session of the Intergovernmental Committee of the International Convention for the Protection of Performers, Producers of Phonograms and Broadcasting Organizations (Rome Convention, 1961) (ILO/UNESCO/WIPO) (Geneva).**
- **20-27 September: Fifth European Regional Conference (Warsaw).**
- **20-27 September: Tripartite Meeting on Social and Labor Issues concerning Migrant Workers in the Construction Industry (Geneva).**

Standards for training

***Technological changes, increasing competitiveness and the worsening of the employment crisis compel training systems to be ever more "profitable". It is perhaps time now to define more precisely the evaluation criteria for the services provided by these systems and set up training standards, says British journalist, Eric Frank, Editor of the* Journal of European Industrial Training.**

During most of its existence, the ILO has devoted considerable energies to developing international labor standards. Although such standards still continue to be adopted and revisions carried out, basically the fundamental work has now been accomplished. Perhaps it is now appropriate for the ILO to assist with standards for education and training.

In many countries the notion of competence-based standards is gaining momentum. Australia, Britain, Germany and Japan have national systems which set standards for work-related skills, or certify for those skills, or both. Some countries are planning to standardize "skill-improvement" training for the current workforce. In Germany and Japan, the transition from education/basic training to work is accompanied by national certification and national examinations. In both Australia and Britain, vocational standards have been established and competency-based training systems developed.

In a growing number of industries around the world, the qualifications of individuals are now based on two criteria: the identification of the competencies required by the jobholders and the definition of the standards to which people are expected to perform in the workplace.

Jacques Maillard

Education and training "standards" can be statements embodying a global vision of what an individual should know and/or be able to do at a given stage in his or her educational development, or they can be specifications of how well a person or group of students/trainees should be able to perform a specific task.

Performance standards and measures can be used when designing the instruction process and/or be related to "outcome" and results. Process-oriented design standards often benefit from some kind of "benchmarking" which can provide information based on empirically-verified practices which seem to be effective in achieving desired outcomes.

Outcome measures and standards focus on results accomplished. If the objectives of education and training are clearly defined, it should not be too difficult to set targets or achievement criteria. For instance, if the measure is "how many people are employed within three months after completion of a training program", the standard for satisfactory performance might be set at 60% or better.

What usually works best is a mix of design and outcome standards. Whilst conventional wisdom prefers outcome standards to design standards, effective performance-management systems typically include both. Care must be taken to decide what measures to use as criteria for judging performance and providing incentives for satisfactory achievement of objectives. Another important issue is the "level" at which standards should be set: would "minimum" standards be acceptable or should we go for "leading-edge" standards, the ones that only the best institutions or operators are achieving? Would a "problem-driven" approach be most sensible, one which involves identifying the existing condition that needs to be improved and setting standards consistent with a solution to that condition or at least a change for the better?

Whilst the minimum standard approach is often the most convenient one, efforts should be made to move to a combination of "leading-edge" and "problem-driven" standards, as these are more likely to yield better long-term outcomes.

There is rapidly growing evidence from many countries and industries and from the education/training institutions themselves, that standards, if suitably selected and measured in a well thought-through performance management approach, can produce a variety of benefits: improved diagnosis and evaluation of what is required; increased focus on outputs rather than inputs; providing individuals with credentials and qualifications; guidance and direction for education and training institutions; greater coherence and coordination among providers; licenses and/or certification for institutions to practice and greater accountability to those providing resources. ❑

This page is open to all participants and observers within the world of work who wish to express a personal point of view on any subject of interest to the ILO.

Media Shelf

In print

■ **World Labor Report 1995.** *ISBN 92-2-109447-2, price 25 Swiss francs.*

The eighth World Labor Report is a round-up of significant events, trends and indicators which touch on some of today's most pressing issues at the heart of the ILO's mandate.

It focuses on: controversies in labor statistics; aging societies and older workers; privatization, employment and social protection; public authorities and the other social partners; retraining and returning to work. The Report is no way intended to be an encyclopedia. Rather, it brings to the fore each year major questions about selected topical issues and aims to help the reader in finding answers he or she may be looking for.

■ **International Labor Review, vol. 134, 1995, n° 1**

Employment and transition are the main themes of this first issue for 1995. M. Godfrey considers medium-term policies to combat unemployment in the transition economies, referring to the experience of countries of Southeast and East Asia. R. Shaban, R. Assaad and S. Al-Qudsi examine the employment situation in the Arab countries, where labor markets have been affected by oil price fluctuations and the adverse impact of the Gulf war on intra-regional labor migration. Returning to the subject of transition, Y. Zhu looks at the development of industrial relations in China under the influence of the change to a market economy and the inflow of foreign investment. In Africa also, the State's disengagement from the economy is leading to a reappraisal of the roles of other players. A. Etukudo discusses the emergence of a class of indigenous entrepreneurs, the role of employers' organizations, tripartism and social dialog in Africa. Lastly, H. Bekkers and W. Stoffers report on the testing in Pakistan of the guidelines for measuring informal sector employment adopted at the labor statisticians' conference in 1993.

■ **Conditions of work digest.** Volume 13, 1994, Maternity and Work. *ISBN 92-2-109199-6, price 50 Swiss francs.*

Maternity protection is now seen as an integral part of strategies to promote equal opportunities and treatment between men and women in employment. This issue is organized as follows:

– Part I provides an overview of maternity protection and analyzes major trends in legislation.

– Part II analyzes the maternity protection provisions contained in national legislation.

– Part III describes how collective bargaining has been used in various countries to provide or improve maternity protection.

– Part IV contains information on action taken at the international level to promote maternity protection.

This issue is essential reading for policy-makers in government, employer and trade union circles who are concerned with the improvement of working conditions and equal opportunity for women of child-bearing age.

■ **Action programs for the protection of homeworkers.** Ten case studies from around the world. *ISBN 92-2-109189-9, price 20 Swiss francs.*

Homeworkers are a particularly vulnerable category of workers due to their ambiguous legal status, their isolation and their low bargaining power. Action-oriented programs aiming to break the isolation of homeworkers also make them aware of their rights and help them to organize and to improve their bargaining position.

This book presents a selection of ten case studies from eight countries – Australia, Canada, India, Japan, the Netherlands, the Philippines, the United Kingdom and the United states – as examples of such programs. Several of these were initiated and carried out by trade unions, others by non-governmental organizations. In some cases homeworkers have formed their own organizations, associations or commercial enterprises. At the end of each case study, the authors assess the problems encountered and the results achieved, as well as describing plans for the future.

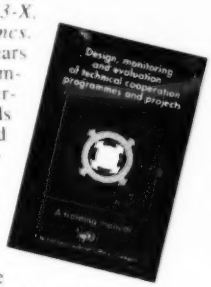
The introductory chapter by Ursula Huws provides an overview of the similarities and diversities of the approaches used to reach and organize homeworkers and is particularly useful for any concerned individuals or organizations that may wish to replicate such programs.

■ **European labor courts: International and European labor standards in labor court decisions, and jurisprudence on sex discrimination.** Labor-Management Relations Series No. 82. *ISBN 92-2-108012-9, price 20 Swiss francs.*

This book covers two topical legal issues: first, to what extent, and in what ways, labor courts use international and European labor standards in their judgments; and, second, national laws on sex discrimination in employment, including the impact of European Court of Justice decisions. Comparative overviews on each topic accompany contributions by eminent judges or chairpersons of industrial tribunals describing practice in Finland, Germany, Hungary, Israel, Norway, Slovenia, Spain and the United Kingdom.

The volume, which embodies the proceedings of one of a series of meetings of European labor court judges, provides an insight into both the similarities and differences in legal systems in Europe, and into the varied approaches taken to topics of common interest throughout the region.

■ **Design, monitoring and evaluation of technical cooperation programs and projects.** A training manual. *ISBN 92-2-109443-X, price 25 Swiss francs.*



This manual bears witness to the importance and interest the ILO accords to evaluation and to its constant concern with such issues. The manual takes into account the experience acquired from the application of established procedures and lessons learned from the numerous training seminars held during the last 15 years in many regions of the world on the preparation and evaluation of technical cooperation activities.

Intended for use as training material, the manual may also be valuable for reference purposes. It is intended not only for officials within the Office, but also for national officials, including those in employers' and workers' organizations who have a role in the preparation, implementation and evaluation of technical cooperation activities.

Consult

■ **LABORDOC.** ILO's database on the world of work (see *World of Work* No. 11, March 1995) has just completed a second agreement for publication on CD-ROM. LABORDOC records from 1980 onwards will soon be included on the HELECON CD-ROM, published by the Helsinki School of Economics. This includes databases of several European libraries with major social science collections. The participating libraries agree to provide copies of documents cited in their databases, so the CD-ROM is a valuable tool for social science researchers worldwide.

For further information, please contact Ms. Eleanor Frierson, ILO Library, CH-1211 Geneva 22. Fax: +4122/ 7996516 or Internet address: frierson@itu.ch

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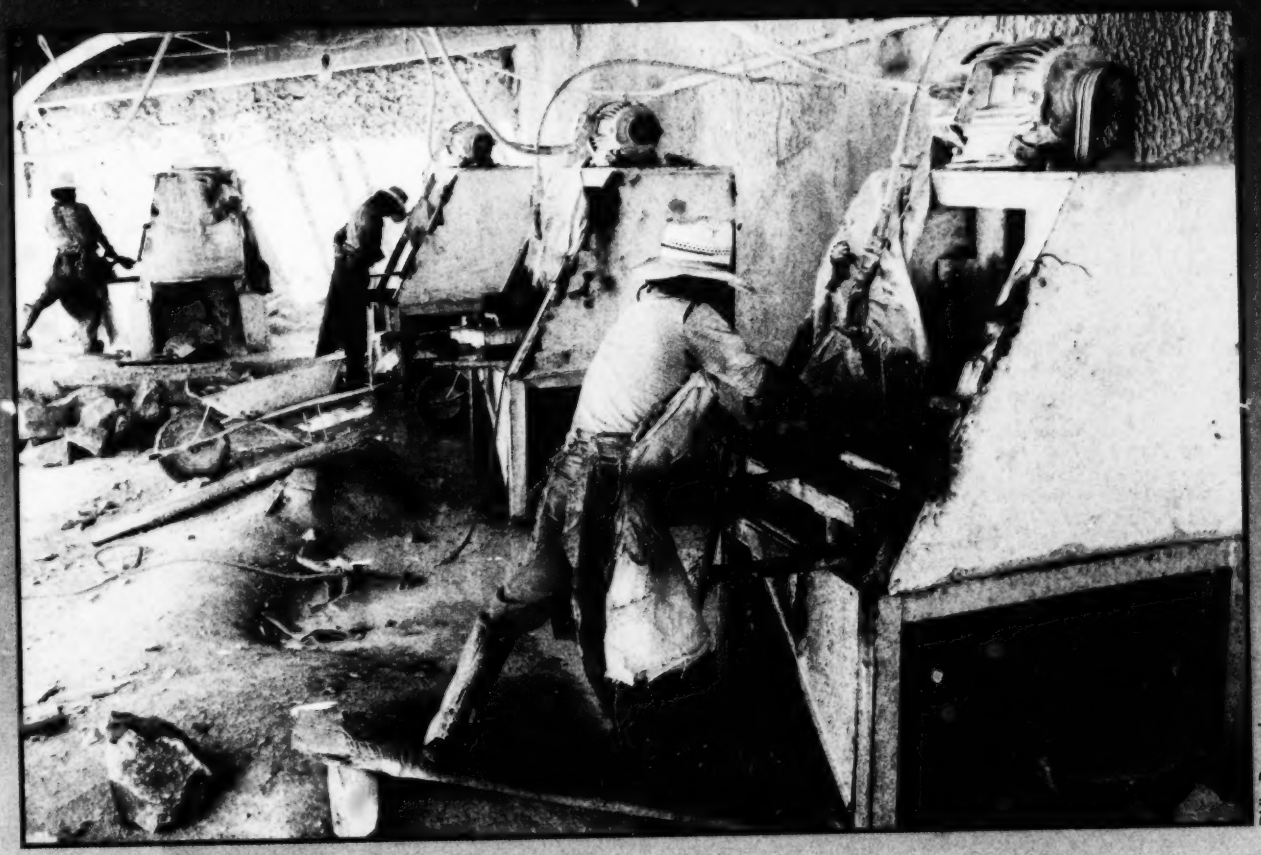

Didier Bregnard

Created in 1919, the International Labor Organization (ILO) brings together governments, employers and workers of its 171 member States in common action to improve social protection and conditions of life and work throughout the world. The International Labor Office, in Geneva, is the permanent Secretariat of the Organization.